

# Amṛta

*by* Yu Hsi

Translator : Ken Kraynak





# Amrtaxxx





## *A poignant beauty — Amṛta*

This is a story of spiritual immortality.

What is the source of genuine human happiness? This is one of those fundamental questions which has stimulated a great deal of inquiry throughout the ages.

The grand ceremony of life is the source of the real; it's the place of unobstructed freedom. The pursuit of this ideal state of being is described in various ways—as waking up from a dream; or as being *in* the world but not *of* the world. But just what is this state of “spiritual immortality” beyond all regret and sorrow? And just how can such a state be realized?

Blooming flowers and sparkling dew ignite our zeal for life; lightning and thunder and the incessantly changing sky demonstrate the inexorable law of impermanence. Only by becoming intimate with reality is it possible to let go, embrace life, and joyfully pour oneself into literary pursuits.

Rain represents the six senses of a sentient being and the associated feelings they give rise to. Thus this story begins with a rain shower and concludes in the early spring.

“*Pitapat, pitapat .....*” the sound of the falling rain sends a ripple deep into the heart of the youthful Enguang, inspiring him to set out on his beautiful journey. His youthful impetuosity is like the downpours of June and the driving winds of August, but in the end he gets in touch with his inherently gentle and sincere nature.

This is a story of the search for abiding truth in the world—  
“The Dharma abides in its respective position, dwelling  
forever in the marks of the world.”

The buddhas appear in the world for the purpose of helping  
us find the way out of the perpetual human predicament. Due to  
ignorance of their essential nature, even celestial beings are subject  
descend to the human realm.

Enguang is a benevolent deity who comes to this world in  
order to undergo a variety of human experiences—love, sorrow, loss,  
etc.— so as to gain penetrating insight into the underlying nature of  
the vast universe.

It is only through experiencing the tribulations of life in the  
human realm that he can gain deep insight into the subtle nature  
existence.

True peace can only be attained through spiritual cultivation.  
The underlying aim of this long novel is to provide an intuitive  
glimpse of the pageant of life.

Energy and zeal arise from having a strong sense of mission  
in life, from being on a lifelong quest. Yet, in the course of this quest it  
is inevitable that one at times falls short of one’s ideals. Amṛta depicts  
the surging momentum of life, and also reveals the interconnectedness  
of self and nature. Carried along by the rhythm of truth and goodness,  
the reader is ushered back to the homeland of life itself; that place free  
of worry, fear, and turmoil; that place where heaven and earth meet;

where beauty and truth quietly come to life.

In the Yijing we read, “The virtue of the great man is identical with that of heaven and earth; his brilliance is identical with that of the sun and the moon; his course is identical with that of the four seasons.” The myriad desultory phenomena of the world are a function of its grand and pure essential nature. It’s as if the universe itself is calling out to those keenly searching for wisdom to see truth in the moon reflected on the water; to hear suchness in the cool breeze coursing through the mountains. Encountering life in this way, one’s spiritual growth proceeds as surely as the turning of the seasons.

In the Analects Confucius states, “If you don’t understand life, how will you understand death?” In his quest for the meaning of life, Enguang arrives at the enchanting Silkworm Island, where he encounters the resplendent movement of life and the myriad strange forms of the boundless universe. Afterwards, the Golden Youth tirelessly teaches Enguang about the boundless glory of the human spirit, from the marvel of emptiness, to the state which transcends both arising and passing away.

Like a silkworm ensconced inside its cocoon, sentient beings are buddhas bound up in the cocoon of their defilements and ignorance. Unable to break out of the tough and tangled cocoon, they have to patiently bide their time until the time for metamorphosis has arrived. Such is the eternal, inexorable law of the universe.

What is the purpose of life? To attain happiness and be free of suffering.

Throughout the universe, beings search everywhere for the Spirit Spring; in this story the sunflower, opening in the morning and closing in the evening, represents ultimate human happiness.

The challenge of human existence is to break out of the net of spiritual ignorance in which we have been snared since time immemorial, an undertaking which requires unrelenting patience. Yet, for those with keen spiritual faculties, the mysteries of the universe appear at every step; for those lacking in such faculties, the universe is little more than a chaotic accident.

Just as in *Prabhūtaratna* Keyura represents purity of spirit, in *Amṛta* Satana is the embodiment of worldly success and indomitable grace. Having been born into this world, it's necessary to actively engage with life; yet it's this very engagement with the myriad things in the world that gives rise to so much mental proliferation. From cradle to grave, we pass our lives frantically chasing and evading the phantoms created in our own minds.

*Amṛta* (a Sanskrit word which literally means “deathless,” but also connotes such ideas as ambrosia, enlightenment, the unconditioned, and the summum bonum) is the story of eternity. Flowers wither and people get old; yet this need not give rise to grief or despair. For, realizing how simple our basic requirements really are, we gain a sense of peace and well-being.

On the cusp of the new millennium, we can't help but wonder about the future of the human race. Purity, perseverance, altruism, and

a joy for life as vast as the universe itself—these are what humanity needs most at this juncture in time. This is what is demonstrated by Satana when she finally sheds her sugary persona and all the petty spirits which have attached themselves to her.

Looking back on the unbridled materialism of the twentieth century, one can only hope that in the new millennium humanity will finally turn in a new direction—towards beauty and the life of the spirit. This is the key which opens the door to a world of happiness.

With his great wealth of experience and immeasurable zest for life, Yu Hsi uses his pen to plumb the depths of the universe in its infinite glory. With ebullient joy and innate perspicacity, he depicts the splendor of the natural world as he tells the story of the universe and our place in it.

For we and Enguang are one and the same.

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From time immemorial the rains have come pouring down  
and the moon has been reflected on the surface of the Ganges. But just  
how long have humans been around?

Although humans have existed somewhere in the universe for  
millions of light years, their numbers have always fluctuated, rather  
like the stars in the sky, or the grains of sand on a riverbank.

Coming and going in waves.

The person observing the waves is also subject to coming and  
going.

Yet, in the midst of all this coming and going, some have  
stopped to ponder what this is all about, to consider where an  
individual human being comes from, and how one becomes qualified  
to be born into the world as a human being!

Unlimited motes of dust swirling in a beam of sunlight.

The aeons roll on without end.



*Amrita* 

# *Chapter 1*



## Chapter 1

### 1. Recollection *Rain Water*

Rain Water is the second of the 24 solar terms into which the year is divided in the traditional Chinese calendar, and corresponds to the end of February and the beginning of March in the Gregorian Calendar. During the Birth of Spring, the first solar term, the warmth of spring enters into the earth, after which the first rainfall signals the beginning of the farming season. It's at this time that the rainfall gradually increases and the accumulated snowfall in the mountains begins to melt, moistening the ground and bringing the plant world back to life.

Rain Water, the time for purity of aspiration and clarity of purpose.

Outside, the rain pelts down against the carriage window. Inside, Enguang uses his hand to repeatedly wipe the fog off the window, now and then grumbling:

“When will this rain ever stop? It's already dark, and I can't even see where I am.”

Following the coast, the express train dashes past several hills before entering a heavily forested area. Throughout the journey, Enguang anxiously peers out onto the pitch-black scenery, lest he miss the stop for the old monastery set out between the mountains and the sea, where he's planning to stay while waiting for his old friend.

Seemingly taking no notice of the blinding darkness, the train churns out its brisk rhythm as it speeds forward into the misty night.

As Enguang wearily observes the other passengers, mostly fast asleep, he can't resist closing his eyes for a short rest .....

"Wake up, young man; time to get down. This is the last stop!" Roused from his deep slumber by a gentle voice, Enguang abruptly opens his eyes and sees standing next to him a kindly old man tapping him on the shoulder.

Still half asleep, Enguang instinctively hurries off the train and follows the crowd towards the village illuminated by a lone flickering light. By now the rain has stopped; the icy evening wind instantly jolts him fully awake. After walking a short way, he stops in the darkness. Somewhat alarmed, he scans the open countryside for some familiar landmark.

"Oh no!" Enguang says to himself, as he nervously gazes over the thoroughly unfamiliar surroundings.

Dejectedly running over to another passenger, he asks:

"How do I get to the old monastery nearby?"

"Old monastery? There's no monastery here! Young man, you seem to have gotten off at the wrong station! The only monastery in these parts is six or seven stations before our village."

Thoroughly dejected, Enguang instinctively turns around and begins walking back towards the station.

"It's quite late and these mountain roads are rather treacherous. You'd better stay the night in our village and carry on in the morning,"

says the old man, the same one who woke him up on the train.

“Right! It’s not very safe travelling through such remote places on a dark, rainy night.”

Despite being urged by the other passenger, Enguang gazes towards the distant flickering light, pauses for a moment, thanks him, and decides to make his way to the old monastery.

The stars having been scared into hiding by the downpour, heaven and earth are enveloped in a blinding darkness. Groping his way along the muddy mountain road, Enguang soon grows weary.

“*Wu — wu —*”

Hearing a terrifying sound approaching in the darkness, Enguang instinctively quickens his pace.

“*Wu — wu —*”

“I hope it’s not a wolf!” Enguang mutters to himself.

As the frightful howl seems to draw ever closer, the tangled tussocks begin to sway. Now thoroughly terrified, Enguang runs ahead at full speed, desperately searching for a safe place to hide.

His hurried steps chased by the chilling wind, after rushing along for a long while Enguang is drenched in perspiration and his legs begin to tremble. Yet, no refuge comes into sight.

Suddenly he makes out a strand of light emerging from the forest and dimly breaking through the misty fog. As if he were a boat guided by a lighthouse, Enguang anxiously makes his way towards the faint light.

He soon hears the sound of flowing water, and the light becomes more distinct. After crossing a single-plank bridge spanning a stream, Enguang discovers that the light is coming from a wooden cottage covered in flowering crape myrtle. Quite relieved, he slows down his pace and walks under the eaves hung with bamboo chimes. Standing in front of the door, he suddenly feels awkward and hesitates.

“*Wu — wu —*” When the strange howling sound again emerges from the forest, Enguang musters up his nerve and gives the door a strong knock.

“Who is it?” a sweet voice calls out from inside the cottage.

“Please let me in. I think there’s ..... a wolf,” Enguang nervously replies.

Soon the door squeaks open and a pretty maiden with a lamp in her hand and a white fox by her side invites Enguang into the cottage.

Seeing that Enguang is pale with fright, the maiden hastens to pour him a cup of hot tea and offers him something to eat. Only then does she begin to speak:

“You must be very tired; you can stay here for the night!”

“I .....”

“No need to explain; first have a rest!”

As she speaks, she leads Enguang to a small, tidy room. After making the bed, pulling out another lamp, and making sure that Enguang is all settled in for the night, she bids him goodnight and straightaway leaves along with the fox, closing the door behind her.

However, as soon as Enguang lies down on the bed and closes his eyes, he suddenly senses that there is a bright light hovering right in front of him. When the door flies open he leaps out of bed .....

“*Pitapat ..... pitapat .....*” sounds the rain as it beats against the bamboo hut. Looking outside the window at the rustling plantain trees, Enguang gradually regains his composure and realizes that he was only dreaming.

By turns sitting and lying on the bamboo bed, as he listlessly stares out the window at the steady drizzle drenching Luotang Mountain, Enguang disappointedly reminisces about the charming maiden and her pleasant cottage. Imperceptibly, a seed of affection begins to germinate in his heart.

The fine drizzle continues for half a month, after which all the plants on Luotang Mountain begin to put forth new shoots, and the brook which winds its way past the bamboo hut begins to flow with renewed vigor.

Absentmindedly gazing at the misty mountains, Enguang dwells on the young maiden who provided a safe refuge just when he needed it the most. The more he muses, the more real the dream becomes .....

\*

Deep in these mountains there is a kind of Arcadia with an

old monastery on a verdant hill overlooking the sea. In the main hall sits a sublime Buddha image cast in bronze. Enguang vaguely recalls that clear autumn afternoon, when his hair was still bound in two protruding braids. He follows the older children as they stealthily make their way into the main hall while the old monk is taking a nap. After climbing up the altar of the bronze Buddha and frolicking around for some time, one of the girls looks up at the Buddha image and says:

“They say that this bronze Buddha is so very august, that all you have to do is wipe it down with complete devotion and it regains its original luster. Let’s have a contest to see who can give it the brightest shine!”

Finding it to be a fine idea, the others immediately take some soft cloths and excitedly began to polish the bronze Buddha.

“Give me a cloth; I want to play too,” calls out the little Enguang upon seeing everybody having so much fun. However, they simply tell him:

“You’re too young. If you happen to break something, the old monk will surely have some terrible punishment in store for you.”

Kept at a distance while the others thoroughly enjoy their polishing game, little Enguang soon becomes bored, whereupon he goes out, finds a few rocks, and begins to juggle them to the right of the altar. However, after playing for a while, he uses a bit too much force and one of his rocks flies out of control.

“Ouch, that hurt!” cries out one of the girls. As it turns out, the sharp rock has landed on her back and made a deep cut flowing with

blood. Straightaway she falls to the ground and begins to wallow in pain.

As the others anxiously help her off the ground, a great uproar arises in the main hall.

“Hurry up and get some rags to wipe up the blood.”

“Your hands are all dirty; don’t touch the wound.”

“No, no; first stop the bleeding.”

While everybody is trying to get a word in, a stern voice suddenly breaks through the din:

“Who threw the stone?”

Frightened, Enguang hurriedly gathers up the remaining rocks, hides them in his pockets, and innocently looks on at the tumultuous scene unfolding around the girl, her face now bathed in tears. He is at a loss as to what to do.

“Hey! Big brother is back!”

“She was hit by a stone and has lost a lot of blood .....

They all noisily swarm around the older boy, now returned from the mountain out back, where he was gathering flowers for making an offering to the Buddha.

Hearing what’s happened, he hands the red lotus flowers to Enguang, walks over to the girl, and takes a close look at the wound. Then he unhurriedly pulls out some green medicinal herbs, places them in his mouth, chews them into a paste, and gently places it on the wound .....

\*

Enguang's train of thought is interrupted by the arrival at the bamboo window of a bird with a green back and a blue chest. Getting up from the bamboo bed, he pulls out some food and places it next to the window for the rain-soaked bird to eat.

The old memory and the recent dream envelop his mind as thoroughly as the spring rain soaks Luotang Mountain. Somehow, Enguang is certain that the girl in the dream is the same girl he accidentally hit with a rock all those years ago.

As the strange dream and persistent memory continue to swirl about in his mind, he opens the door, looks out upon the vast landscape, and murmurs to himself:

“I must find her!”

## 2. The Mysterious Silkworm Island *Waking of Insects*

Waking of Insects is the third solar term, and corresponds to the middle of March. At this time the first thunder claps of spring rouse the insects out of hibernation. This is also the season when farmers are busy sowing seeds and transplanting rice seedlings in hopes of a good harvest in the fall.

Waking of Insects, alertness of mind; sincere determination brings good results.

Ever since coming of age, the Native Youths have had all sorts of marvelous adventures, which they now look back on with much fondness. Eager for yet more edifying adventures, they again mount their wind-sail and set out in search of the mysteries of the universe.

In high spirits, they follow a stream. However, lulled by the gentle afternoon breeze wafting up from the water, they are overcome by drowsiness and soon fall fast asleep .....

“Eh? What is this place?” Coming out of his long slumber and discovering that their bamboo raft is now drifting about on the vast ocean, Suvarna calls out:

“It’s the Ocean! We’ve arrived at the ocean!”

Awakened by Suvarna’s shout, the others wake up:

“Wow! It’s dark!”

“How did we get to the ocean?”

“Am I still dreaming?”

“While we were sleeping we must have floated downstream, all the way to the ocean,” says Rupya after pondering for a moment.

“Listen! There’s the sound of a *qin*,” says the perceptive Zhenzhu in a soft voice, as the others busily speculate as to where they might be.

Informed by Zhenzhu, the others quiet down and begin to listen, whereupon they hear the faint sound of a *qin* wafting up from the middle of the ocean. At times sweet, at times mournful, the sound of the music sends them into a reverie, as their raft is drawn towards the source of the sound.

After sailing for some time, just as the reflection of the moon appears on the surface of the water, the music abruptly stops. No longer guided by sound of the *qin*, they find themselves cast adrift on the boundless ocean.

“There’s an island up ahead,” announces one of them, as they drift along in the thick fog.

Sure enough, a dozen or so nautical miles away, a lovely verdant island has appeared amongst the blue and white waves.

“What a beautiful island; I’ll bet it’s full of hidden treasures!”

“Looks like we’re in for another adventure!”

“Now that we’re almost there, let’s have a look around!”

Spurred on by their curiosity, the Native Youths soon reach the island and disembark on the shore.

“Such lovely conch shells! And they all have a hermit crab

living inside!” exclaims Zhenzhu, as he observes a large group of hermit crabs scrambling about the sandy beach and reef rock.

“Wow, this must be the hermit crab heaven!” they announce in one voice while peering around the shoals with bulging eyes.

“Lugging a shell around all day, don’t they get tired? Why go through so much trouble?” Zhenzhu wonders concernedly.

“Hermit crabs are an odd species. As soon as they are born they find an empty shell and make it their home. When they outgrow it they find a bigger one. Because the shell provides safety from predators, they take it with them wherever they go. So even though it may seem like a burden, to them it’s indispensable,” explains the knowledgeable and experienced Rupya.

When Youxi Jinlun gingerly picks up a conch shell, its resident hermit crab instantly retreats inside, whereupon he excitedly asks:

“Fascinating! Is this hermit crab’s conch shell a help or a hindrance?”

Their curiosity sated, the Native Youths continue to follow the shoreline in search of adventure. Their field of vision is filled by the beach morning glories embellished with lavender flowers rising up from the glossy, deep-green leaves gracefully swaying in the sea breeze. Reaching a promontory, they gaze out into the distance and marvel at range upon range of multi-peaked mountains, flying waterfalls, and a pellucid creek winding towards the coast.

They decide to follow the creek upstream, and begin climbing a green hill, gradually making their way deep into the mountains in

search of its hidden natural beauty.

“What happened to all the lovely flowers?” sighs Zhenzhu upon noticing that the flowers of the beach morning glories have all withered and dropped.

Following a stairway skirting the creek, they ascend a slope thickly covered by snake vine laden with tiny vermilion berries; interspersed amongst the vines are datura flowers which take on an ethereal appearance in the slanting rays of the setting sun. On both sides of the stairway, bell-shaped foxglove flowers waver in the twilight breeze, their purplish-red color juxtaposing with the white datura flowers, appearing like so many fairies dancing in the wind.

“Careful! Don’t touch those flowers!” warns Rupya. “Don’t be fooled by its pretty white flowers; the entire datura is highly poisonous. And stay away from that foxglove too; as you might know, it’s also known as ‘dead man’s bells’!”

Hearing Rupya’s warning, they stare at one another in dumbstruck amazement.

Continuing upwards, the shrubs gradually give way to a lush grove of white cedars and Taiwan acacias; the delicate yellow flowers of the acacias and the pink-purple flowers of the cedars interweave in riotous profusion. With each gust of wind, the petals come showering down through the twilight glow, creating an enchanting scene and sending the Native Youths into a reverie.

However, as night falls and they go deeper into the forest, the path is overgrown with vines, making it highly difficult to proceed.

Soon Rupya spots a clearing under a large tree and announces that this is where they'll set up camp for the night.

At dawn the Native Youths are awakened by a loud squeal. Taking a quick look around, they discover that a small macaque has become entangled in the dodder vines entwined all over the acacias, cedars, and shrubs.

After extricating the macaque with much commotion, they realize that it was the dodder vines that had made it so difficult to walk the previous evening. Although its flossy, yellow-green vines take on an exquisite appearance in the first light of dawn, the dodder is a troublesome plant.

Following the creek further upstream, pushing aside the thickly entangled dodder vines as they go, they emerge from the forest and gain an expansive view—a broad valley filled with lush mulberry fields. Eyes bulging at the sight of the luscious, purple-red berries, they shout with glee and rush forward.

As the first rays of the sun disperse the multi-hued, rosy clouds, there appears in the mulberry fields a group of pretty maidens with enchanting smiles and winsome eyes. Some are dressed in white muslin tied with a red silk belt and pick the green mulberries; others are dressed in aquamarine silk gowns tied with a purple-blue belt and pick the plump red mulberries.

Thoroughly enchanted by their lovely appearance and dexterous movements, at first the Native Youths mistake the maidens

for celestial beings come down to earth. Staring in amazement, they only regain their senses when they hear the mild calls of the maidens greeting them. After making some inquiries, they discover that this island is called Silkworm Island and that Satana is its owner.

Invited by the maidens to meet the friendly Satana, the Native Youths excitedly follow the maidens through the lush mulberry fields and deep into a dense forest.

After passing over a number of stone bridges spanning limpid streams, they arrive at a magnificent palace set inside a garden. The maidens inform them that this place is called the Palace of One Hundred Flowers, that it is Satana's favorite residence, and that she has put a lot of planning and effort into constructing its buildings and collecting and arranging its gardens.

Looking around in wonderment, they see elegant pavilions, arched bridges, and wonderful waterfalls surrounded by a great variety of captivating flowers—peonies, roses, skyflowers, and Dutchman's pipes ..... The gardens are embellished with the lovely sight and calls of skylarks and thrush.

In the middle of the garden is a splendid palace with nine beams, eighteen pillars, and seventy-two ridges. With its many carved beams, frescoes, and pearl screens, it appears fit for a monarch, yet has an intimate ambiance. All of the doors, windows, and beams are adorned with silk hangings of various colors which slowly waver in the breeze. Add to this the graceful maidens with fragrant clothes and gorgeous hair waving about, and the Native Youths can't help but fall

into a mood of leisurely abandon.

After entertaining their new friends with all manner of delicious mulberry drinks—tea, juice, and nectar—the maidens take their measurements and provide them with elegant, custom-made clothes.

From listening to the maidens, they gradually come to learn that the sound of the qin they heard on the ocean was actually meant to guide them to Silkworm Island. They are even more surprised to learn that tonight Satana is hosting a grand banquet and that they are amongst the guests of honor.

Invited to stay in the splendid palace set amongst the enchanting mulberry fields and so graciously entertained by the lovely maidens, the Native Youths excitedly look forward to the evening's festivities and meeting Satana.

## **Satana**

Actually, in Satana's heart of hearts there is a nebulous melancholy, something related to her experience in a past life. Though somewhat bashful and a bit impetuous, the beautiful Satana naturally conveys a sunny countenance.

Somewhat self-absorbed, at times she is deep in thought, at times lost in a flight of fancy, making her seem rather unpredictable. Yet, because she is very decisive, she has an air of importance about her.

Satana is also in the habit of unwittingly knitting her brows, for she sometimes feels like she's not up to par, and that heaven has not treated her fairly. However, whenever she feels heavy hearted, she puts on a brilliant smile—usually unconsciously—delighting all who see her.

While Satana does have her aspirations, they aren't remarkably lofty. However, she has charisma, and that's why others are more than willing to follow her.

Though rather petite, she has a heroic air about her. The lovely yet vague expression in her eyes conveys tenderness and affection. This is the legendary Satana.

As the sun begins to ascend over the sea, Asuluo hurries towards the glass house where her mistress is staying.

For a powerful storm last night has left the rose garden in a state of disarray. Regretfully treading on the fallen roses, Asuluo comes to the door, slowly opens it, and enters the fragrant vestibule; yet no one is to be found. Feeling greatly relieved, she murmurs to herself:

“Nothing to worry about!”

Making a happy exit, she decides to go for a stroll on the beach. But before she can make her way through the mulberry orchards, she hears Ayou and Adapo loudly beseeching somebody:

“Please, don't be so headstrong. We've searched so many deserted islands for this herbal remedy. And it has its best effect if

taken at sunrise on the morning after a big rainstorm.”

“Adapo and I have stayed up all night so that we wouldn’t miss the sunrise. Hurry up and drink it! This is your lucky day .....”

Asuluo listens closely while making her way through the mulberry trees and towards the pavilion.

“Asuluo, I’m over here — ” Satana happily calls out.

Smiling, Asuluo turns and waves to Satana—always dressed in bright red—and says:

“Is everything okay?”

“Just fine! Except that they are still a bit worried,” answers Satana, flashing a mischievous smile and pointing towards Ayou and Adapo, who together hold a silver bowl in their hands.

Asuluo was first drawn to Satana by her sharp mind and noble bearing. And over so many years, no matter how Satana is actually feeling, in Asuluo’s eyes, she is always in a good mood.

Asuluo is Satana’s most capable assistant. Ever since she inherited this lonely island from her grandfather, Satana has been entrusting the faithful and trustworthy Asuluo with all sorts of matters, both big and small. In fact, Asuluo possesses all the skills required of a manager and takes good care of the substantial resources Satana inherited from her family. As a result, even though Satana is a dreamer by nature and is still quite young, she is a highly successful entrepreneur and the leader of a prosperous realm.

When Silkworm Island was purchased by her grandfather, although pristine, there was no economic activity to speak of.

However, under Satana's capable leadership, the economy has prospered, but not at the cost of the environment.

After making a detailed survey of the island's climate and soil, and gaining an understanding of current market requirements, she made the bold decision to import hundreds of thousands of mulberry seedlings to this remote island.

With the help of her assistants—Yanbo, Yunxing, Chenwai, and Wulu—she planted the seedlings all over the island. A year later the mulberry trees were near maturity and some had already begun to bear fruit. It was then that Satana introduced a wide variety of silkworms to the island. This is how her silk kingdom began.

Thanks to the able assistance of Asuluo and a host of others, in just a few years Satana succeeded in realizing her dream of transforming the island into an economically vibrant Arcadia. Amongst the lush and fragrant mulberry orchards she has built a number of villas, pavilions, and kiosks of various styles. The glass villa in the rose garden is her favorite residence.

Every time she returns to it her heart leaps with joy in unison with the dancing trees. Seeing the green mulberry leaves, the red mulberries, and the white silkworms, she feels like a child again. Every time Asuluo takes her to the wine cellars to survey the many barrels of fragrant mulberry wine in storage there, she becomes intoxicated merely by smelling its sweet fragrance.

With her long hair, sunny countenance, and sharp mind, Satana is regarded as something of a living legend. Moreover, her

beneficence, kindness, and sincerity have won her quite a few dear friends.

Despite her good fortune, Satana harbors a hidden sorrow which others find difficult to understand. Ever since adolescence, every time there is a rain storm, she experiences a back pain which is so severe and debilitating that her face becomes completely pale. As a result, whenever the weather begins to change, she loses her usual rosy composure.

Satana has a vague recollection that when she was very young she was happily polishing a bronze Buddha statue along with a number of other children, when a sharp rock came flying out of nowhere, hitting here on the back, and causing her to wallow about in pain. Although the wound has healed, ever since that day she feels the same torturous pain whenever there is a rainstorm.

Although Satana has received all sorts of treatments from various famous doctors, nothing has made the slightest difference. Yet, her grandfather has not lost hope. He regularly sends people to search all over for some new remedy, and whenever he hears about a talented doctor, he puts down whatever he is doing and immediately goes to seek him out.

One time, he happened to come to a remote fishing village, where he met a white-headed old man who told him:

“This sort of condition can’t be cured by medicine alone. You’d better go and see those women living in the grotto; maybe they

can help.”

Thereupon Satana’s grandfather spent a great sum to appoint the four women living in the grotto as Satana’s personal physicians.

Each one has a different specialization.

Ayou specializes in nutritional therapy. In her efforts to treat Satana’s chronic back pain, she provides her with all sorts of natural foods intended to improve her constitution and increase her antibodies.

Shuye’s specialty is prayer. She spends each night performing a special prayer in which she supplicates the God of Fortune to come and drive away the evil spirit causing Satana’s back pain.

Pomo specializes in divination, which she uses to monitor any changes in Satana’s condition and to seek information as to its root cause.

Adapo’s job is the most difficult. She goes deep into the mountains and collects medicinal materials, which she makes into pills and powders for Satana to take.

Yet, despite all their efforts, Satana’s condition has not improved. Each time a strong wind laden with salt comes off the ocean, a disease-causing demon is aroused by the smell and commences to prick Satana all over her back. And when a rainstorm comes in, the evil spirits come out in full force to brazenly torment Satana with such fierceness that she can do little more than writhe about in pain.

Only after the storm passes does the terrible pain finally abate.

In the morning Ayou and Adapo go to Satana’s window to

wake her up and give her a foul-smelling medicinal concoction to drink. Although Satana is fed up with taking their useless medicines, they insist that she continue to do so. Thus the appearance of Asuluo just now has brought a smile to Satana's face, for she knows that the clever Asuluo will conjure up some pretext which will give her a chance to be alone and enjoy a peaceful moment after a night of relentless torment.

### 3. Palace of the Silkworm Queen *Vernal Equinox*

Vernal Equinox, the fourth solar term, marks the mid-point of spring. Rain on the first day of Vernal Equinox is regarded as a good omen, as indicated by the old maxim “Rain falls on the first day of Vernal Equinox and everyone is busy; first plant the wheat, then transplant the rice.” A good harvest in the fall requires both favorable weather and a great deal of human effort. If either one is lacking, the harvest will suffer. Thus it’s not hard to imagine why farmers tend to be cautious and circumspect.

On the Vernal Equinox the sun rises due east, and sets due west. As the sun sets on this day it has the appearance of a golden drum hanging on the horizon. At this time sit down facing west and calm the mind while observing the sunset. Continue observing until the golden drum becomes clearly visible even when your eyes are closed. In this way one generates boundless merit.

Vernal Equinox, genial weather, everything growing with exuberance. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

As the sky gradually darkens, someone stands on a street corner and admires this masterpiece of beauty — the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

In a picturesque basin on the northern end of Silkworm Island is a very modern and prosperous city. As soon as night descends, the monolithic skyscraper of brilliant golden sheen begins to radiate countless beams of dazzling light which illuminate the entire island.

This palatial structure towering between the earth and the stars is the headquarters of Satana's business empire. In recognition of the exceptional beauty of Silkworm Island, she has named it the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

The Palace of the Silkworm Queen is like a miniature universe. Satana has made ingenious use of the most advanced technology to design a building which seems to come straight out of a fairy tale. She has gone all out in providing the Palace of the Silkworm Queen with every imaginable facility—from the convenient, to the novel, to the sublime, it's all there in breathtaking abundance. What's more, ever fond of entertaining, Satana frequently hosts sumptuous banquets at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen so that lots of people have a chance to admire its boundless wonders.

So as to accentuate Satana's queen-like status, Asuluo handles all the arrangements. As it so happens, in recent days Asuluo has been working around the clock in preparation for the most splendid banquet which has ever been held at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

This banquet is especially important to Satana, and she has repeatedly reminded Asuluo to be sure to invite some unique and interesting guests.

It's now late at night, and Asuluo is still hard at work. She enters a back room in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen and says to a voice-activated computer:

“Please find some unique and fascinating people and invite them to the banquet.”

No sooner has she finished speaking, than the computer's monitor is projected on the wall.

Thereupon she hears the sound of a babbling brook. As the sound becomes clearer, it is progressively overlaid with the harmonious sound of frogs croaking, birds singing, and cicadas buzzing. Then there appears on the screen a limpid blue stream bordered by wild flowers of various colors with a large number of butterflies leisurely fluttering about. Suddenly there appears amongst the flowering shrubs a bamboo raft carrying several ingenuous-looking youths inquisitively looking about. Her curiosity piqued, Asuluo asks:

“Who are they? And what are they doing?”

Before she can finish her question, the computer has already printed out a paper, the top line of which reads:

“Zhenzhu, Rupya, Suvarna, and Youxi Jinlun—the Native Youths in search of the true appearance of life.”

“The true appearance of life?” wonders Asuluo, lifting her head and seeing on the screen a bodhi-tree leaf dotted with transparent drops of water.

“Surely there must be some special reason for our latest trip

down the mountain!”

A vigorous yet harmonious voice rises over the echoing sound of the dewdrops falling into a deep pool. As Asuluo gazes upon the dark-green leaf, she seems to have entered another world and is suddenly overcome with an indescribable feeling of peace and joy.

As the image zooms out, there gradually appears the mottled trunk of the old bodhi tree. Next, as if the computer is showing off, there appears out of nowhere a verdant grassland covered with scintillating dew drops, whereupon Asuluo’s snow-white clothing is stirred by a light breeze steeped in the smell of flowers, grass, and soil.

Then there appears a tranquil meadow filled with flowers. In the meadow is a lofty bodhi tree, in the shade of which a stately young man and a carefree-looking young woman are playing chess on a stone table.

“Alas! If not for that kindly old man, I wouldn’t have to return to that dusty place,” says the woman, the golden lotus on her right shoulder tilting as she moves one of her chess pieces.

Her eyes filled with the bright and brilliant flowers, Asuluo feels as though she is eavesdropping as she bashfully continues to listen to the conversation.

“How so?”

“It’s a long story. In this world there is an incredibly beautiful Arcadia. Originally it was readily accessible to all, but later on, after the outside world began to exert a pernicious influence, it was concealed. Now few people even know about it; and even if one

wanted to go there, it would be very hard to find it.

“Zhiyue, have you ever been to that place?” asks the young man, looking down while fondling the exquisite jeweled bottle hanging from his waist.

“Um — ” brightly smiling, she takes a sip of tea, hands the young man a purple-gold flower petal, and says:

“You see, the kindly old man gave this to me when I was about to leave my native place, the Pure Land. It’s also known as Lebang, and the people there are prosperous and carefree. Every day, just as the first rays of the sun appear, a gentle and fragrant breeze wafts through the treetops, and splendid, ethereal music fills the air, gently waking the people from their sleep.”

“At breakfast time, large numbers of fragrant flowers slowly float down, covering the table and the ground. The people of Lebang are kind and virtuous; they usually take their meals seated in a lotus blossom .....

When she suddenly stops speaking, the young man asks:

“And?”

“One day at breakfast, everyone was shocked when it was discovered that one of the lotus seats was empty. Then the kindly old man hurriedly came to me, gave me this lotus petal, and told me to find its owner and bring him back to Lebang.”

“Have you found him?” asks the man concernedly.

“No, not yet. It’s a vast world with so many people; I have no idea how long it will take to complete the mission the kindly old man

has entrusted me with!" Thereupon Zhiyue stands up, looks at the sky, carefully puts away the perpetually fresh lotus petal, and says:

"I have to go!"

As she speaks, her graceful form gradually disappears into the flower-covered meadow .....

"I simply must find you — "

Suddenly a voice full of longing jolts the screen, bringing Asuluo back from her reverie. Like a supple silk thread, the voice weaves its way through the misty mountains replete with overlapping water curtains. Then she sees its source: a young man with a dazed, lovesick expression, leaning against a bamboo door, blankly staring into space.

"I simply must find you — "

His sincere voice seems to weave into a great net which entwines Asuluo as she watches the screen in astonishment.

"Enguang ..... Enguang ..... Enguang ....."

These are the blurry words which appear on the screen, accompanied by the sound of rain falling on banana leaves.

Asuluo draws near the screen for a closer look.

Suddenly the screen begins to rotate and emit innumerable rays of golden light, causing Asuluo to jump back a few steps. Then the entire Palace of the Silkworm Queen is enveloped by a bright golden net of light, entirely overshadowing the building's own splendor.

Overcome by horripilation, Asuluo tries to regain her composure while using her hands to shelter her eyes from the intense light.

Apprehensively returning her gaze to the screen, as if the computer were reading her mind, there is a popping sound; within the rapidly moving rays of light there appears one large, golden word: Ganlu.

After some time, all the images slowly disappear and the Palace of the Silkworm Queen regains its original luster.

“Asuluo — Asuluo — What’s happened?”

Anxious footsteps make their way to the back room. As soon as Satana stands in front of the heavy door, it opens automatically, for it has been specially designed to recognize her breath. Satana’s familiar voice brings Asuluo, now drenched with sweat, back to her senses. Still staring at the screen, she rubs her eyes and pulls herself together enough to greet Satana. Seeing that Asuluo is not herself, Satana concernedly asks:

“Asuluo, what’s happened?”

“Uh — nothing. It must be that I’m not yet fully used to this new computer .....

Just as Asuluo is deliberating whether or not to tell Satana about what’s just happened, the computer begins to play a lilting melody. Curious, Satana draws up to the computer and sees on the monitor a long list of names scrolling down in time with the music.

Now puzzled, she asks:

“What is this?”

Directly questioned by Satana, Asuluo can't help but happily explain:

“Didn't you ask me to invite some rather unusual guests to attend the next banquet? Well, here's the guest list, prepared with the help of this computer. Everyone on the list is highly distinctive; some are individuals, and some are being invited as groups .....

Becoming more excited as she speaks, Asuluo then tells Satana everything that has just transpired.

As she is listening, Satana can't help but open wide her glittering eyes. Looking over the guest list, as if deep in thought, she turns to Asuluo and earnestly says:

“We need to go all out in putting on this event. I want all the guests to go away with a positive and indelible impression of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.”

## **The Banquet**

In order to make the banquet a most memorable event, no expense has been spared in decking out the Palace of the Silkworm Queen with all the latest gadgets required for putting on a spectacular sound and light show. Tonight the Palace of the Silkworm Queen rivals the eye-riveting splendor of the legendary Palace of the Moon.

As the distinguished guests arrive at the splendid reception

hall, cups are raised and the merriment begins.

In order to ensure that Satana will be the focus of attention, several months ago Asuluo, Yanbo, Yunxing, Chenwai, and Wulu used the red silk unique to Silkworm Island to make a specially designed evening dress for her to wear at the banquet. Dressed in this classically elegant attire, the white-clad Asuluo ever at her side, as Satana mingles with the guests in the reception hall, she has the regal air of a princess. Glowing with health and radiating vitality, charm, and grace, as soon as she appears, all eyes turn her way.

Tonight, Satana is basking in honor and glory.

“Rupya, are we dreaming, or is this for real?” asks Suvarna upon entering the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, unable to believe his bulging eyes.

Tonight the Palace of the Silkworm Queen is decked out in such a sumptuous array that all who enter it are overcome by admiration:

“This place is as lovely as a flawless pearl!”

As though arriving at Prospect Garden, the Native Youths stroll past the water curtain and enter the reception hall adorned with a halo of multicolored light.

All of a sudden, as though welcoming these special guests, the dazzling halo emits a patterned image which repeatedly encircles the Native Youths, generating a round of shouts and applause from the other guests.

The meticulous Asuluo is thoroughly pleased as she surveys

the results of all her efforts. Seeing the outline of Silkworm Island appear within the halo, Satana is taken aback and says to Asuluo:

“Asuluo! From today onwards, I formally entrust you with the management of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. I want you to make an active effort to familiarize yourself with — ” Stopping in mid-sentence, looking straight ahead with a spellbound expression, Satana slowly says:

“There’s something very unusual about these young men; just look at that colorful aura coiling around them!”

As Satana looks on with rapt attention, as if responding to some mysterious gravitational pull, the resplendent patterned image continues to circle around the Native Youths. The eagle-eyed Asuluo instantly recognizes them to be the Native Youths, and excitedly says to Satana:

“They are the Native Youths in search of the true appearance of life.”

After briefly whispering something in Satana’s ear, looking like a pure-white cloud floating in the sky, Asuluo lithely makes her way to the Native Youths and extends a cordial greeting:

“I’m Asuluo, the manager of this place. I’m so glad you were able to make the long journey to attend the banquet. Please come with me.”

After looking at one another in amazement, the Native Youths follow Asuluo as she makes her way through the crowd and back to Satana.

They are soon taken aback by the otherworldly appearance of the slim and graceful Satana—her fair skin glowing with health; her stylish yet sedate evening dress setting off her graceful figure; her lovely smiling face, like a lotus emerging from the water; her eyes beaming with affection. Seeing that the Native Youths are dumbstruck by the sight of such stunning beauty, Asuluo gently takes up Zhenzhu’s hand and says to Satana:

“This is Zhenzhu, and this is Rupya, Jinlun, and Suvarna. They are a group of youths with a dream!”

Seeing that Asuluo already knows all about them, the Native Youths are even more surprised. Fortunately, the cool-headed Rupya immediately steps forward to extend a greeting on their behalf. Thereupon, Asuluo proudly introduces the hostess:

“This is the owner of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen — Satana.”

A powerful sound wave ripples into the ears of the Native Youths.

Satana greets each one with a cordial handshake and earnestly says:

“Welcome. I’m so glad you could make it. Tonight the Palace of the Silkworm Queen is open to all.”

As glasses of red wine are passed around in preparation for a toast, Satana says with a big smile:

“This wine is very special. It’s made from the fermented mulberries grown right here on Silkworm Island. Try it; it won’t make you drunk.”

With breath as fragrant as an orchid, despite her mild tone of voice, whenever Satana speaks, she is very persuasive. Convinced, Suvarna takes up a glass of the sweet wine and downs in one gulp. In an instant, an incomparable sense of ease permeates his entire body, impelling him to say:

“Wow! I’ve never tasted such an excellent wine before!”

Convinced by Suvarna’s praise and glowing expression, the others have a taste and then start to chatter ceaselessly.

Enguang finally arrives at the bustling metropolis, thoroughly wearied by the long journey from Luotang Mountain.

Ever since that rainy night when he dreamed about the girl he injured with a rock when he was a little boy, the same girl who has grown up to be so graceful and kind, Enguang has not enjoyed a single moment of peace. For the dream has constantly been haunting him.

In recent days he has been spending lots of time watching the clouds and pacing back and forth next to the Baihua Stream which borders Luotang Mountain. Although he has little idea of what the outside world is like, he is sure that if he is ever to find that girl in his dream, then he will have to cross over the Baihua Stream, leave Luotang Mountain, and make his way to the outside world, so bustling and unfamiliar.

Enguang is torn between staying and going. One day while loitering next to the Baihua Stream, a voice suddenly emerges from the chilly water:

“Enguang, a grand banquet is going to be held at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen on the evening of the Lantern Festival, and Satana, the hostess, would like you to attend.”

Upon hearing the name “Satana” Enguang inexplicably becomes excited. Trying to keep up with the source of the sound, he frantically runs along the stream and, forgetting all about the old monk’s admonitions, shouts out towards the stream:

“I’ll be there!”

Without wasting any time, Enguang departs from Luotang Mountain and heads for Silkworm Island. After continuously traveling for many days on end, he finally arrives at the main entrance of the towering Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

Having always lived a simple life close to nature, the splendor and opulence of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen makes Enguang feel a bit uneasy, and he hesitates to enter. However, as soon as he remembers that enchanting name he heard emanating from the Baihua Stream, he plucks up his courage and strides through the opulent door.

Seeing the rustic-looking Enguang approaching, the doormen immediately step forward and cordially usher him to the main hall, now bustling with activity.

As soon as he enters the swank and glitzy hall, however, the unassuming Enguang again feels rather nervous. Taking some tea and a snack, just as he begins to look around for a quiet corner where he can settle his nerves, he spots a familiar face coming towards him through the crowds. Though they haven’t met for a long time, he

recognizes the face to be that of Zhenzhu; forthwith his nerves settle down.

“Enguang, it’s you!” says Zhenzhu as he takes his hand and leads him towards the center of the hall.

“Enguang!” says Suvarna, jumping for joy.

Thereupon Rupya and Jinlun interrupt their chat with Satana and run over to greet Enguang.

“Enguang, come with me; I’d like to introduce you to somebody,” says Zhenzhu while glancing towards Satana, now curiously looking their way. Having led Enguang next to Satana, Zhenzhu says:

“This is our good friend — Enguang.”

Looking upon the ravishingly beautiful Satana, Enguang’s heart skips a beat and he begins to blush.

“This is the owner of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen — Satana,” says the visibly pleased Zhenzhu.

“Satana!” As soon as he hears this name, Enguang feels as though he has just been hit by a ton of bricks.

“Enguang, I’m Asuluo. I’m so happy that you received the invitation I sent you.”

“Oh — thanks,” perfunctorily replies Enguang to the delicate damsel clad in white. “Satana, you look just like the woman I dreamed about!”

As Enguang continues to stare at Satana, a thousand different feelings come flooding into his heart.

Noticing Enguang's distress and embarrassment, Rupya begins to recount the former adventures Enguang and the Native Youths have had together, quickly assuaging the awkward mood. Soon Satana is led off by Asuluo to greet more guests, but Enguang can't take his mind off Satana.

In her search for the person who disappeared from the Lebang Pure Land, Zhiyue scours the vast galaxy, always carrying the same succulent, purple-golden lotus petal.

Today, while Zhiyue is conducting her search, she suddenly receives a message in the form of a sound wave. As it turns out, she too has been invited to attend the banquet at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

Pleased to accept the invitation, when she arrives in the ultra-modern city where the grand event is being held, she can't help but marvel at Satana's exquisite creation.

Silkworm Island is like a world apart. The resplendent lights of the soaring and majestic Palace of the Silkworm Queen seem to wrap around the night sky.

Greatly impressed with the ever-changing appearance of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, Zhiyue slowly mounts the palatial stairs.

"Zhiyue, how is it you have also come?" calls out a voice from behind. Feeling a light tap on her shoulder, Zhiyue turns around and says:

“Wow! It’s Kengeng!”

“Had I known you were going to be here, we could have come together,” says Kengeng with a sincere smile.

“Has Satana invited you as well?” asks Zhiyue.

“That’s right!”

Happily chatting about old times, Zhiyue and Kengeng leisurely stroll into the reception hall of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

As the other guests enter the packed hall, it’s as if they are carried in by the entrancing sound of the lilting music. However, Zhiyue is startled and says:

“Why are they playing this music?” Looking around and seeing the other guests thoroughly enjoying the music, she asks Kengeng:

“Could it be that the Lord of the Five Aggregates is hiding here?”

“Right, this surely is the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates. But it’s hard to say if the Lord of the Five Aggregates is here, because he’s a crafty fellow, and difficult to recognize,” slowly answers Kengeng.

Recognizing Zhiyue and Kengeng as two chess players who appeared on her computer screen, Asuluo rushes up to greet them, and leads them over to meet Satana.

Despite her great wealth, beauty, and fame, Satana is not at all arrogant. Ever good at putting others at ease, she readily strikes up a

conversation with the two guests from afar.

As more guests arrive wave upon wave, somehow Satana manages to personally greet them all, Asuluo by her side all the while. When Satana leaves, Zhiyue turns to Kengeng and doubtfully asks:

“Satana is so pure and kind; she couldn’t possibly be the Lord of the Five Aggregates. But why then is the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates being played in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen?” Kengeng wonders as he looks around the hall.

“Hi! I’m Suvarna!”

Suddenly a cheerful voice interrupts Zhiyue and Kengeng’s train of thought.

Ever fond of making new friends, as soon as he sees the naturally graceful Zhiyue and the mighty Kengeng, Suvarna excitedly introduces himself and the rest of the Native Youths. As though already quite familiar with the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, Suvarna takes them around to see the various sights. However, each time Satana appears, both he and the other Native Youths, as though enamored, gather round her for some more jovial banter.

Seeing how utterly enamored Enguang and the Native Youths are with Satana, Kengeng says with a sigh:

“These young men are all so nice, but I fear that they are going to be led astray by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates!”

Hearing Kengeng’s words, Zhiyue takes a good look at the Native Youths and then smilingly says:

“In that case, we certainly can’t just stand by and watch with folded arms as they get lost in the five aggregates and forget their original nature.”

“You’ve got that right!”

Thereupon, Zhiyue apprehensively says:

“But the five aggregates are so entrancing and compelling; they can easily take control of the mind. What should we do?”

As though he has a card up his sleeve, Kengeng flashes a broad smile and says to Zhiyue:

“Don’t worry! I’ve brought with me one thousand eighty seeds from the bodhi trees in my native place. We can use them to counteract the demonic power of the five aggregates.

“But they’re having such a good time chatting with Satana. What should we do?” says Zhiyue while casting an apprehensive glance towards the Native Youths.

“Not to worry. All we have to do is closely observe their every move, and when the opportunity presents itself, then we’ll make our move.”

For the rest of the evening, Zhiyue and Kengeng attentively follow the unsuspecting Native Youths. Just before daybreak Satana suddenly announces that the entire Palace of the Silkworm Queen is now open and that all the guests are free to have a look around. Thereupon, throughout the building there echoes a piece of music so exquisite that all those who hear it become even more enamored with the many marvels of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

“The Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates is becoming increasingly powerful. We’d better do something right away, or else the Native Youths will become enslaved by it.”

“The Native Youths are heading towards the virtual park. I’ll get there before them and arrange the bodhi seeds; you lead them into the middle,” says Kengeng before stealthily rushing off to the virtual park replete with birdsong and the fragrance of flowers.

The ingenious and genial Satana has an uncanny ability to tune into what motivates different individuals, and is highly skilled at making people feel as though they are getting exactly what they want. Before long, she has succeeded in captivating the hearts and minds of the Native Youths, such that each one fancies himself to be her personal favorite.

Now thoroughly hypnotized by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates, the Native Youths are utterly engrossed in the virtual flowers and trees. It’s as if every cell in their bodies is vibrating in tune with the seductive strains of the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates.

Zhiyue looks on in amazement as all the guests are seduced by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates. Wandering about the virtual park with its innumerable lifelike simulations of everything in the natural world, their clarity of mind is usurped by powerful waves of sensual desire.

“Zhiyue, over there is a rare spring,” says Kengeng, standing nearby and waving towards Zhiyue.

Getting the message, Zhiyue immediately says to the thoroughly entranced Native Youths:

“Hey, look over there. Kengeng has discovered something really extraordinary.” Then he takes Zhenzhu by the hand and leads him towards Kengeng. Beckoned by Zhenzhu, the others follow close behind.

Crossing over a rocky gully filled with brambles, they enter a flooded meadow, whereupon the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates suddenly stops. Just then Zhiyue hears the faint sound of the ocean tide emanating from the shallow water.

Nearby Kengeng stands barefoot in the middle of the water, looking highly pleased as he waits for them.

Wave upon wave, the undulating sound of the ocean, as pure and clear as the chanting of scriptures, flows into the ears of the Native Youths, cleansing the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates from their minds. Soon a smile as broad as the sea slowly appears on their faces.

“This sound of the ocean; it’s so much better than that music we were listening to just now!” Jinlun earnestly tells Kengeng.

“That’s for sure! Nothing compares with the pure sound of nature. What a pity that so few people fully appreciate the original, unadulterated sound of the universe,” adds Kengeng.

“Isn’t the Palace of the Silkworm Queen just amazing; it’s full of so many delightful surprises,” says Suvana, now that the sound of the ocean has brought him back to himself.

Although Zhiyue knows full well that it was the bodhi seeds that produced the sound of the ocean, the Native Youths give all the credit to Satana.

Hoping to take the Native Youths out of hearing range of the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates, Kengeng tells them:

“The place where I live may not be as luxurious as this place, but it does have a lot of natural beauty. Seeing that you are free, let me take you there to experience something different!”

After listening to Kengeng’s glowing descriptions of his homeland, the Native Youths continue discussing it until it’s time for the banquet to conclude.

#### **4. Town and Country** *Clear and Bright*

Clear and Bright, the fifth solar term, describes the firmament at this time of year (early April). The first day of Clear and Bright is the traditional day for making offerings to one's ancestors and tidying up their graves; many people also take the opportunity to enjoy an outing in the countryside. As for the connection between the two activities, some see making offerings as a way of seeking permission from the ancestors before taking a rare break at the beginning of the agricultural season; others see it as a way of inviting the ancestors to join their descendants for an outing.

Clear and Bright, a time for circumspection and striving forward with diligence.

Ever in search of the true appearance of life, the Native Youths were lucky enough to meet up with Zhiyue and Kengeng at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, thereby averting being ensnared by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates and gaining the chance to visit another kind of unusual place.

With Zhiyue and Kengeng as their guides, the Native Youths leave the hustle and bustle of the city and make their way to the open country, where spring is in the air and the elegant song of the mountains and rivers is heard wafting all around. All the way, they feel as if they are being caressed by the enchanting sights and sounds of spring.

After four or five days, they are surprised and dubious when Kengeng takes them to a dusty place covered with dark scrub.

However, Kengeng is seemingly oblivious to their grumblings. Repeatedly reassured by Zhiyue, they grudgingly agree to spend the night in this forlorn place.

The next morning, as they are being awakened by the first rays of light, Kengeng hastens everyone to get an early start. Now feeling rather dispirited, the Native Youths trudge through the long stretch of thorny brush. After some time, Zhiyue suddenly points towards an extensive, wind-blown forest and happily announces:

“Inside that forest is Kengeng’s homeland.”

Looking out at the luxuriant forest, the Native Youths feel greatly relieved.

“Wow! The air here is incredibly fresh. Let’s have a rest before continuing!” proposes Suvarna, before reclining on a tree and then sliding down to the cool ground. The others follow his lead, whereupon Zhiyue says:

“As soon as we pass through this grove we’ll be at Kengeng’s homeland and we can take a long rest. Let’s hurry up!” Then she and Kengeng set off without further ado. Suddenly regaining their usual vigor, the Native Youths follow close behind.

Upon emerging from the dark, cool grove they are greeted by a range of low hills, whereupon Kengeng is filled with joy as he proclaims:

“On the side of that hill is where I live.”

Thereupon they all spontaneously charge forward across the grassy slope covered with wild flowers.

Arriving at the top of the grassy hill, a vast plain spreads out before their eyes—golden-yellow tassels of rice swaying in the wind; plots filled with green vegetables; furrows of snow-white and light-yellow cauliflowers; orchards laden with red apples, purple grapes, and succulent peaches; wildflowers everywhere .....

“Wow!” they all say with a deep sigh.

“What a natural work of art. It’s even more beautiful than I expected.”

“Suvana, here in Kengeng’s homeland, you can see the true face of beauty. Contrived beauty is not necessarily real. The kind of beauty which is an integral part of life is by far the most meaningful. Let’s go! We’re falling behind,” says Zhiyue while patting Suvana on the shoulder.

Having arrived at his native place, the mighty Kengeng suddenly takes on a carefree, childlike countenance. With spry steps he leads the Native Youths along the narrow embankment separating the fields, and deep into his bucolic homeland, as lovely as a landscape painting.

Breathing in the scent of the fluttering flowers, rice stalks, and fruit trees, the Native Youths feel thoroughly refreshed. Stumbling in amazement as they go, they follow Kengeng past plots of tender vegetables, over pristine babbling brooks, through orchards laden with luscious fruits, and around fields of golden-yellow rice tassels

wavering in the wind. Like a group of curious schoolboys, the Native Youths ask all sorts of questions. Pleased to have a chance to introduce his beloved homeland, Kengeng answers in great detail.

Before long, they come to a copse with seven orderly rows of trees—bodhis, mangosteens, bamboos, ginkgos, banyans, pines, and pagoda trees. Curious, Rupya points towards them and asks:

“Why are all these trees planted here on the periphery of the fields?”

“They form a wind break, and also keep down the dust. Without these seven rows of trees, the dust and sand would come sweeping in and make a mess of the place.”

Hearing Kengeng’s explanation, Zhenzhu asks:

“And what are those pools of water next to the trees for?”

“Those are lotus ponds. They look nice, but more importantly they also provide water for irrigation. Without them, this place would be a barren wasteland,” cheerfully explains Zhiyue.

Still brimming with curiosity, the Native Youths follow Kengeng towards the chimney smoke gently spiraling upwards from the village.

On the way they see young cowherds in groups of twos and threes, dressed in short pants and sleeves. Leisuredly riding on the backs of their buffaloes, merrily playing their flutes or humming a tune, they tap out a rhythm as they make their way home. As the gently hulking silhouettes slowly fade into the distance, the Native Youths look on with knowing smiles and deep admiration.

Upon arriving at a group of houses made of rice straw, just as they all begin to keenly admire a large old tree straining under the weight of its abundant red and yellow fruits, they hear several fierce roars coming from inside one of the houses. Startled, the Native Youths move back a few steps. However, Kengeng just smiles, opens the half-closed door, and says:

“This is where I live. Come in and have some tea!”

The Native Youths just look at each other apprehensively. Noticing that they were startled by the roar, Zhiyue gently takes Zhenzhu by the hand and leads him inside. Seeing that Zhiyue is not the least bit afraid, the others pluck up some courage and follow him inside.

Curiously looking around the simple yet elegant living room, they notice that the only furnishings are a wooden table with chairs and a bronze oil lamp.

Although from the outside it appears not large, inside there are various rooms of different styles—a study, a meditation room, a flower room, and a tea room. While Kengeng prepares something to eat, the Native Youths curiously look around and are highly impressed with its elegant simplicity.

Exploring further, they find a backyard full of sweetgrass.

“Wow! What’s that?”

Looking in the direction Zhenzhu is pointing towards, they see a small lion with golden-yellow hair lying on the ground inside a bamboo enclosure. Seemingly knowing that they are guests from afar,

the lion slowly gets up, gives its tail a friendly wag, and walks towards them.

“What a frightful-looking lion!”

“Indeed he is! But he also seems to be very friendly.”

Before Suvarna and Jinlun can continue their discussion, Rupya suddenly announces:

“This is no ordinary lion, it’s a suanni!”

“Wow! This suanni is a lot like Kengeng—mighty but sweet!” blurts out Zhenzhu.

Now thoroughly fascinated, the Native Youths begin to play with the Suanni as if they were old friends. Before long Kengeng comes out to the garden and the Suanni gives out a fierce roar tempered with affection. When Kengeng opens the wooden door, the Suanni runs over to him like a child to its mother, whereupon the others all have a big laugh. Kengeng’s mighty yet gentle character leaves a deep impression on their minds.

During the day Kengeng shows the Native Youths the local sights; at night they join the other villagers in going to the Ganlu Lecture Hall to listen to Kengeng give a discourse.

By all appearances, Kengeng’s discourses are a major event in the village.

Every day around dusk the entire village, young and old alike, gather at the lecture hall standing alone on the hillside. First there is a music and dance performance, during which the people discuss how their farm work is going.

When the stars begin to wink at the earth, fragrant lamps are placed throughout the hall, whereupon Kengeng ascends the sandalwood teacher's seat and begins discoursing on agriculture.

Every evening Kengeng speaks on a different agricultural topic, from sowing to harvesting. Kengeng is also the spiritual leader of the village, and while speaking on agriculture takes the opportunity to also teach the villagers how to cultivate their hearts and minds while working in the fields.

By listening to Kengeng's teachings, the Native Youths also gradually learn how to turn agricultural work into a spiritual practice. Having gradually discarded the useless knowledge accumulated in their minds, every day, rain or shine, they roll up their trousers and modestly join the villagers in the fields to share the work and to learn new farming techniques.

By the time the seedlings begin to sprout, the Native Youths have already gained much joy and insight. They decide to stay a bit longer in this natural classroom established by Kengeng and wait for the harvest.

## 5. Verdant Luotang Mountain *Grain Rain*

Grain Rain, the sixth solar term, refers to the life-giving rains which water the rice and wheat fields. This is also the time when the women of farming families are busy picking mulberries and raising silkworms.

For the crops to grow well, they need both human care and the blessings of heaven.

Grain Rain, a time to look within; a wholesome sense of shame brings wholesome results.

With the coming of the spring rains, the earth finally throws off its dusty grey clothing; the new leaves of yellow-gold and vivid green give Luotang Mountain a delightful appearance.

Roused from their slumber by the timely rains and warm air, the tea trees on Luotang Mountain burst forth with fragrant shoots which imbibe the tender sentiments of spring. When Enguang returns from the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, the new tea leaves are ready to be picked.

While Luotang Mountain is as lovely as before, after being away for a few weeks Enguang is no longer the same care-free youth he was before.

Although the banquet at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen was just a one-off event, the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates has silently followed Enguang all the way back to Luotang Mountain. Indeed, the entire mountain now seems to be under the influence of

the Kapila Incantation, a magical net formed by a spell devised by the sorcerer Kapila, formerly of the Brahma heaven.

Although the hills are full of new spring leaves ready to be picked, Enguang no longer finds any pleasure in going out at the break of day and loading his wicker basket full of leaves, for his thoughts constantly go back to Satana's smile and knitted brow. These days he just absent-mindedly picks the leaves and gazes down towards the dusty land below, thinking of Satana in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. Firmly under the spell of the bright and beautiful Satana, Enguang's peace and happiness are now a thing of the past.

As the days go by, his yearning for Satana only becomes stronger.

Every evening Satana appears to him in a dream, and after waking up he feels as though he's still in the dream. Yet, every time he thinks of going back to find Satana, he remembers the time when the Old Monk departed so many years ago .....

He also recalls the spring day when the awe-inspiring Old Monk suddenly turned up in Luotang.

He was only ten years old at the time, but the arrival of the strange Old Monk wearing a patchwork robe brought him much joy. Of average build, the Old Monk's clear, bright eyes, furrowed brow, and beaming countenance made a deep impression on Enguang, and he soon began to stealthily follow the Old Monk wherever he went. Whenever the Old Monk would go down by the water or out to the

old tree in the meadow to practice meditation, Enguang would follow him, sit down in a place nearby, but out of sight of the Old Monk, and imitate the Old Monk's posture and countenance, right down to the subtle smile on his face.

Having early on discovered that the curious Enguang was secretly observing him, one day the Old Monk went amongst the tea trees and skillfully plucked a tender new leaf covered in dew. Then he suddenly turned around, looked straight at Enguang hiding behind a lush tea tree, and said in a kindly voice:

“My boy, Luotang Mountain is chock full of treasure. As you may well know, picked and dried, these leaves can be used to make tea with a delicate and refreshing fragrance! Come here; I'll teach you how to do it.”

After nervously hesitating for a moment, Enguang was overjoyed as he walked over to the Old Monk.

Over the following days, Enguang learned all sorts of things from the wise and experienced Old Monk. What's more, he learned that Luotang Mountain had all sorts of hidden treasures that he'd never known about.

Happily following the Old Monk as he went about exploring the area, Enguang was full of wonder and felt as though he were coming to know Luotang Mountain for the very first time.

One day, as they were floating along the stream in a bamboo raft while collecting wild honey, the Old Monk turned to Enguang and said in a grave tone of voice:

“Enguang, Luotang Mountain is your lifelong refuge. No matter what, you must do your best to stay right here. Mark my words.”

The very next day the Old Monk disappeared and never returned. Ever since then, his final exhortation has been constantly lingering in Enguang’s ears.

As a result, every time Enguang thinks of going to find Satana, the words of the Old Monk begin to reverberate in his heart, and he changes his mind. However, he is now so overcome with yearning that this last line of defense of his has become increasingly tenuous.

Intellectually, Enguang knows that he should not rashly leave Luotang Mountain. Yet, in his mind’s eye he constantly sees Satana beckoning him, and the image is only getting clearer from one day to the next. In such a conflicted state of mind, Enguang passes the days in utter misery.

In his woeful state, Enguang no longer recognizes the radiant beauty of Luotang Mountain; for him everything seems to be continually shrouded in a gloomy mist.

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Luotang Mountain in the three months of summer.

This is where the buddhas of the past repeatedly subdued Mara, the Evil One.

“Xiu! Xiu!”

“Xiu! Xiu!”

Following an ancient custom, the summer rains retreat is the time of year in which those who have taken monastic vows refrain from traveling, intensify their spiritual practice, and make a concerted effort to conquer their defilements. In response, worried that their efforts may succeed in taking them beyond his sway, Mara, the Evil One, comes to the summit of Luotang Mountain and takes on all manner of beguiling appearances—for some seductive dancing girls dressed in alluring attire; for others a celestial bodhisattva; a lonely and destitute old man; an injured child; or a survivor of some calamity. In this way, Mara makes his best effort to entice the monastics away from their practices, ensnare their minds, and impair their ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal.

Today, while Master Bianzhao is taking the Persistent Calyx Boy, one of his disciples, past the summit of Luotang Mountain, a light comes out of the top of the Buddha’s head and illuminates those monastics who have strayed from the path—those who have been inveigled into accepting a golden bowl; those who have been seduced by sensuality; those who wear a glib smile while mistakenly believing that they are free of all desire; and those who silently sit in a cave fancying themselves to be arhats. However, all of these manifestations of Mara—both friendly and fearful—are already well known to Master Bianzhao.

Finally, unable to endure any more, Master Bianzhao sighs and says to the Persistent Calyx Boy:

“Quiet! Listen!”

“Everyone has a spark of wisdom; this is one’s real master.”

“You just saw how Mara takes so many different forms and then entraps people in the inferno of the five aggregates. One imbued with compassion can’t just stand by and watch them suffer; he has to do something!”

“A golden-hued youth named Ganlu, endowed with infinite compassion, will come to this world to teach the Dharma and lead beings to the Pure Land known as Lebang. He comes for the benefit of gods and men; take him as your refuge!”

Thereupon the Persistent Calyx Boy makes a full prostration.

At that very moment, all the translucent drops of dew hanging on the leaves in the forests on Luotang Mountain give off a brilliant light which illuminates the entire mountain.



*Amrita* 

## *Chapter 2*



## Chapter 2

### 6. Yushi *Birth of Summer*

On the first day of Birth of Summer, the seventh solar term, the farmers use the first crops to ripen to make offerings to the gods and ancestors as a way of announcing to them that they have had a successful harvest and would like to share it with them. It's also a way of expressing gratitude for their blessings and protection, for gratitude is a source of unlimited blessings and happiness.

Birth of Summer, all living things growing in vigorous profusion. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

This morning, after putting the cover back on one of the innumerable scriptures he has received from Prabhutaratna, Yushi takes some glacial water off of the shelf, boils up some tea, peers over the snow-draped mountains far off in the distance, and savors the meaning of the scripture he has just finished reading. Quite satisfied with his insight into the import of the passage he has been reading, he glows with pure happiness.

After many lifetimes of intense study of the scriptures, no matter how abstruse a scripture may be, all Yushi has to do is glance it over and he immediately penetrates its meaning and doesn't forget it. Ensconced high up in the snow-bound mountains, he continually

engages in his spiritual practice with unwavering diligence. One time he almost died in a blizzard, after which he finally broke through the haze of ignorance.

After taking a sip of tea, he exits his grass hut to take a stroll, whereupon he is surprised to see five or six pink Chinese peonies poking through the snow.

“Finally, the time is right!” he smilingly says while gazing upon the peonies which had been lying dormant in the snow for decades. Thereupon, in accordance with his intention, he appears in the Saha World.

Having learned from the scriptures that there is a place known as the Saha World, out of boundless compassion he has decided to be reborn there. But when he does so, he is unexpectedly filled with an indescribable joy, whereupon he wonders:

“It’s said that the beings in the Saha World are under the influence of the Kapila Incantation, and as a result suffer all sorts of tribulations. Yet, for the most part, the people here seem so happy. Could it be that they have broken free from the Kapila Incantation?”

Although he has already been on the spiritual path for many years, when he arrives in the Saha World he fails to fully ascertain the actual state of affairs behind the apparent prosperity and superficial happiness. As a result, he unwittingly becomes entangled in the numerous allurements of the Saha World, as a result of which he loses his former august countenance.

After continually reveling in the beguiling delights of the Saha World for some time, Yushi gradually forgets about the pure-white snow of the mountains surrounding his erstwhile hermitage; his vows; and the lovely peonies breaking through the snow. Now thoroughly entangled, he spends night after night lost in the superficial delights of the Saha World.

While roaming about in her Dharma ship to the far ends of the universe, as she crosses a snowy ridge, Zhiyue happens upon some nearly withered peonies next to a grass hut covered with snow. Inside the hut she finds a number of palm-leaf scriptures yellowed and covered with dust.

Picking up one of the peonies, she tosses it into the sky, whereupon it splits into numerous petals. After circling over the roof of the hut several times, they flutter upwards and gradually disappear into the vast, white firmament swirling with snowflakes.

Pursuing the petals in her Dharma ship, Zhiyue passes by numerous celestial bodies, both large and small.

As if heading for the far end of the universe, upon nearing a planet enveloped in myriads of dust, the petals suddenly come to a halt. Thereupon Zhiyue senses a subtle yet powerful force taking hold of her ship. Just as she is wondering what to do, the voice of the Golden Youth suddenly comes echoing through space:

“Ever since it came into existence, the Saha World has been under the influence of the Kapila Incantation. Though invisible, this

demonic magic spell has full power over all those who remain ignorant of their true nature. As for Yushi, he is already firmly within its grip.”

Alerted by the message of the Golden Youth, Zhiyue uses her supernatural vision to locate Yushi, now wan and sallow as he staggers down the street in his opulent attire. Taken aback by the sorry sight, she instructs her Dharma ship—born of a vow and guided by her thoughts—to swiftly convey her to the Saha World.

Upon entering the Saha World her Dharma ship is buffeted by the Kapila Incantation. Then the black wind of ignorance appears in the sky and the Kapila Incantation sends forth its magical nets one after the next. However, making full use of its miraculous ability to maneuver and change size, the Dharma ship evades them all.

Just then, the intoxicated Yushi looks up and sees a peony petal fluttering in the clouds. Noticing that it seems to be smiling and waving at him, he suddenly recalls his erstwhile supernatural powers and his hermitage in the snow-swept mountains.

Desiring to fly up into the sky, but unable to do so, Yushi realizes that he has lost his supernormal powers and is now just an ordinary person. Looking up again, he finds no trace of the peony, and his memory of the snowy mountains gradually fades into a fuzzy dream. Just then, feeling as though a dagger has pierced his heart, Yushi breaks down and bitterly weeps.

Then he thinks back on all the scriptures he once knew so well, hoping that this will lead him back to his erstwhile way of life. Yet, scriptures are merely scriptures, and no matter how much he

reminisces about the past, in the present he is nothing but a wastrel abandoned to vice.

Just as he is about to fully give in to his looming despair, a brilliant ray of light suddenly flashes in the dark sky, pierces through the Kapila Incantation imprisoning the Saha World, and rends asunder the net of dust enveloping Yushi.

Yushi is amazed by the sight of the brilliant Dharma ship approaching him while intoning the incomparably mighty Surangama Mantra. As the ship nears, he sees a sagacious maiden dressed in flowing garments standing at the jeweled railing, holding a golden talisman, and intently gazing straight at him. In an instant, just as a ray of hope appears in Yushi's heart, a resplendent light comes shooting down from the ship, picks him up, and carries him on board.

Protected by the Surangama Mantra, Zhiyue's Dharma ship ascends, again breaks through the Kapila Incantation, and heads for the snowy mountains.

As they proceed, the talisman in Zhiyue's hand gives off a pure light which revives Yushi, who has already spent aeons in the Saha World. Bathed in the incomparable sound of the sutra chanting of the Golden Youth, like a newborn baby, Yushi is cleansed of the grime of passion which envelopes the Saha World.

Powered by the sound of the Surangama Mantra, the Dharma ship breaks through the multiple layers of deluding fog thrown out by the Kapila Incantation, and swiftly makes its way to the inconceivably

distant snowy mountains. After smoothly passing over a series of precipitous ridges covered with ice, the multi-colored ship weaves its way around frozen cliffs, avalanches, and hailstorms, and towards a towering peak deep within the snow-swept mountains.

Recognizing the familiar snowscape, Yushi is overcome with remorse. As feelings of sorrow mixed with joy churn around in his heart, he declares:

“How humiliating! I had practiced diligently for so long, and had such a great reputation, but when tested by the magic spell of the Saha World, I fell flat on my face. How fortunate I am to have been rescued by Zhiyue and the Golden Youth; otherwise, all the merit accumulated over so many lifetimes of spiritual practice may well have been lost forever. Alas! I wonder what sort of reproach the Golden Youth has in store for me .....

As Yushi is still wondering uneasily, the Dharma ship passes by a hail storm and arrives at an auspiciously silent summit.

“Yushi, you’ve been practicing so long. How could you still be so foolish?”

Startled by the Golden Youth’s roaring voice, the beguiling haze obscuring Yushi’s eyes suddenly lifts.

When the Dharma ship disappears, a brilliant thousand-petaled lotus suddenly emerges from the golden talisman in Zhiyue’s hand. Then the jeweled lotus begins to give off a dense, multicolored cloud which quickly draws the talisman towards the Golden Youth. As the Golden Youth slowly stretches forth his arm, the talisman begins to

spin and give off a blinding light. Enveloped within the golden light, Yushi regains his senses.

Then the light shoots up into space, breaks up, and forms into innumerable glistening lotus flowers which slowly float down onto the elevated platform where the Golden Youth is sitting cross-legged. At the same time, the Surangama Mantra silently enters into the golden expanse on the top of the Golden Youth's head.

“Yushi — ”

Being called by the Golden Youth, Yushi rouses his faculty of mindfulness. Reverently placing his palms together in front of his chest, he makes three full prostrations to the Golden Youth. After rising to his feet, he looks around at the snowy mountains he has been away from for so long.

The mountains and peaks seem more sublime than before. Watered by the Dharma rain showered down by the Golden Youth, the lotus pond comes back to life, and is soon filled with thriving lotus flowers. Yushi can't help but look around for the purple flowers he once planted in accordance with the Golden Youth's instructions.

All of a sudden, he sees innumerable coreligionists solemnly seated around the Golden Youth. Recalling his egregious misfortune, he lowers his head in shame.

The pure and compassionate Ganlu responds by stretching out his golden arm and stroking Yushi on the head. Then a warm current of energy flows through Yushi's entire body, assuaging his confused heart, whereupon he sobs:

“For so long, I was the most learned of all the disciples; everybody had so much admiration for me. But now I know that, as far as practice goes, I was just a beginner, for I was almost enslaved forever by the Kapila Incantation. I’m profoundly grateful for the compassionate Ganlu for bringing me back to the path of the true Dharma.”

The Golden Youth says in a tender voice:

“Yushi, you and I are close relatives and have a spiritual affinity. Why did you first decide to give up all the entanglements of the world and become my disciple?”

Somewhat comforted by the Golden Youth’s sympathetic words, Yushi reverently replies:

“When I was very young I learned from my mother that you were an enlightened master. When you came back home and I saw how the pellucid light of wisdom and the beaming glow of compassion had entirely transformed your countenance, I intuitively understood that if one is to attain the thirty-two primary marks and eighty secondary marks of a buddha, one has to cut off the defilements. That’s why I left the world and became your disciple.”

“Yushi, what do you use to see these sublime marks of mine? And why do you have such esteem for me?”

“I use my two eyes to see these marks of yours, so rarely seen in the world, and when I do, boundless joy springs up in my heart.”

“No doubt it’s the eyes and heart through which this joy springs up; but these are the very same faculties which keep you

trapped in the cycle of transmigration. Only by knowing them for what they really are is it possible to subdue the defilements,” says the Golden Youth gazing intently at Yushi. “Yushi, where are your eyes and heart?”

“All sentient beings are endowed with a rational mind which resides in the body; the eyes are on the face, and can be used to see all manner of forms,” answers Yushi straightaway.

“Now, inasmuch as the mind is percipient, if it’s located in the body, then wouldn’t it be necessary to first know all about one’s internal organs before being able to perceive external forms?”

Perplexed by the question, Yushi fumbles about for an answer, one moment stating that the mind is internal, one moment saying that it’s external, and then saying that it resides in the eyes .....

After some time, a thick fog descends on the peaks of the snowy mountains.

“Yushi, what you are talking about; that’s not the real mind!”

As the words of the Golden Youth go streaming through the dusky, cool air, Yushi is consternated. The Golden Youth continues:

“Yushi, even though you have vowed to practice the Dharma, due to your arrogance, you can’t recognize the true mind. As a result, you are still wandering around in samsara.”

Now silent, a light as brilliant as a thousand suns radiates from the Golden Youth’s face, dispelling the mist from the snowy mountains.

The sky now clear, the Golden Youth looks over his disciples seated before him and says in a kindly voice:

“From time immemorial, whenever a spiritual aspirant fails to attain enlightenment, it’s always because he doesn’t recognize his original purity, and then mistakes the mundane mind for his true nature.”

Hearing the Golden Youth’s compassionate reproach, Yushi anxiously looks at the fish frolicking amongst the duckweed growing in the lotus pond.

Then the Golden Youth extends his arms to either side, whereupon a splendid light springs forth from the palms of his hands and flies over to the right of Yushi. Startled, Yushi looks around for the source of the light, whereupon the Golden Youth sends forth a second dazzling light, which flies past Yushi’s left side. Again startled, he hastily looks to the left, trying to get a good look at it.

“Yushi, why are you looking around in such a flurry?”

“I saw this splendid light shoot past me just now, and .....

Yushi answers coyly.

“What is it that’s moving; your inherent nature, or your head?”

Vaguely getting the point, a spark of understanding ignites in his heart. Coming out of his mental fog, he confidently answers:

“Golden Youth, it’s my head turning, lead about by external objects. Err — It’s like my hand; it opens and closes. But when it comes to our true nature, there is neither opening nor closing. Yet, people mistakenly identify with the things of the phenomenal world

and then spend their lives trying to get them and hang onto them, but all they end up doing is getting trapped in a web of their own making.”

Thereupon the Golden Youth takes up a snow lotus, hands it to Yushi, and says in a kindly voice:

“My boy, don’t be fooled again. If you can put your fickle mind at rest, even if the Kapila Incantation were to become even more powerful, it still won’t be able to ensnare you.”

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Illuminated by the moonlight, the glittering snowy peaks enter into a sacred realm of sublime beauty.

“This will be a holy night,” says the Benevolent King to himself while looking up at the bright light flickering on the horizon.

Despite his exalted stature and great wealth, the Benevolent King values wisdom above all else, so much so that he considers anyone sincerely seeking the way to liberation to be more fortunate than he is. Ever since he met the Golden Youth, he goes to see him whenever he has a chance, for he finds that the Golden Youth emits a light of wisdom which puts his flighty mind at rest.

Having emerged from his long period of tribulation, Yushi now has a serene countenance. Serving as the personal attendant of the Golden Youth, he experiences incomparable happiness. Seeing Yushi so thoroughly contented, the Benevolent King has even greater

admiration for the Golden Youth.

Seated in meditation, the Golden Youth slightly opens his eyes and smiles at the Benevolent King. Though knowing that the Golden Youth is omniscient, the Benevolent King reverently bows to him and says:

“There are many in my kingdom who believe that death amounts to annihilation. Although I’ve been fortunate enough to hear your teaching on this in the past, I still don’t fully understand it.”

The ardent words of the Benevolent King are followed closely by the assembly, and all eyes fall on the Golden Youth.

“Benevolent King, Is your physical body as imperishable as a diamond? Or is it subject to decay?” asks the Golden Youth in a genial tone.

“Even though I am honored as the head of this kingdom, my body is gradually decaying, and some day it will die,” replies the king dejectedly.

“In as much as you’ve never died before, how do you know that your body will eventually turn into ashes?”

Just then, a golden light appears in the sky and, as if responding to the words of the Golden Youth, swiftly forms into a splendid beam of light fluttering amongst the dark clouds. Observing the sight, the Benevolent King anxiously says:

“Although I’ve never personally experienced death, I know that my thoughts are in a state of constant flux. Isn’t my body the same? Everything in the world is changing, and over the course of

time, old age sets in.”

As the king sighs, Yushi and everyone in the assembly reluctantly admit that their lives will one day come to an end, giving rise to memories of their many youthful indiscretions. Suddenly a somber atmosphere overtakes the assembly.

“Now, this decay of the body, does it come all at once?” asks the Golden Youth.

After pondering for a moment, the Benevolent King replies:

“This decay of the body doesn’t happen all of a sudden, say after ten or twenty years. It’s something that’s happening all the time; from moment to moment we are gradually aging. This is something nobody can avoid.”

As the king is speaking, the moon breaks through the clouds and sends its bright rays in all directions. All of a sudden the Ganges River miraculously appears in the moonlit sky. Seeing the great river replete with glittering waves surging forth through the Milky Way and towards the snowy mountains, the assembly is amazed and overjoyed.

“Benevolent King, how old were you when you first saw this beautiful Ganges River?” asks the Golden Youth in a voice pure and genial.

Recollecting his carefree youth, the king replies:

“When I was three years old my mother took me across the Ganges. That was the first time I saw that majestic river,” replies the king, fondly remembering how his mother held his hand as they stood

on the river bank while a cool breeze caressed his tender spirit.

“Is the river you saw at the age of three the same river you see now at the age of sixty-two?”

Brought back to the present by the Golden Youth’s voice, the king sighs and says:

“It’s the same; it hasn’t changed at all.”

“Benevolent King, as you may well know, although your hair has turned white and your face is wrinkled, it’s just the body that is subject to birth and death. As for the nature of perception, it has never changed!”

Although usually astute and quick to follow an analogy, in this instance the king doesn’t completely get it. Looking at the Golden Youth with a perplexed expression, he hopes that further clarification is forthcoming.

As the bright moon continues to illuminate the star-filled Ganges, the spiritual seekers high up in the snowy mountains clearly see the remarkable sights in the Great Chilocosm. Just then, the Golden Youth half closes his eyes, looking like he is about to enter samadhi. Knowing that when the Golden Youth enters samadhi, he may remain in that state of deep concentration for months on end, the king hastily but reverently asks:

“May the compassionate Golden Youth please explain — ”

“Whatever is constantly changing is necessarily subject to destruction. But whatever doesn’t change in response to external conditions neither arises nor disappears. In addition to this material

body, we also have a spiritual essence which is neither born nor dies. Benevolent King, in the midst of arising and passing away, why would you want to bind yourself to birth and death?”

As the king contemplates the Golden Youth’s words, a glimmer of wisdom appears in his eyes, but it’s not enough to break through his confusion.

“Suppose a person were traveling by foot through a remote place and arrived at an inn. After spending the night, early the next morning he would wave goodbye to the owner of the inn and continue on his way without the least bit of hesitation.

Opening his eyes and focusing his gaze on the king, the Golden Youth says:

“Benevolent King! It’s the innkeeper who remains at the inn year round, for he is the owner and host. In the same way, the true host is not the perishable body, nor is it your fickle thoughts which run about in accordance with all manner of changing external conditions. That which is beyond desultory thoughts, that which neither comes nor goes—that’s the stable and true mind, that’s the host!”

His confusion finally dispelled, the king is overjoyed and circumambulates the Golden Youth three times.

Suddenly the king sees the rain of the Dharma falling on the dream-like Ganges bathed in brilliant moonlight, and forming into a transparent bridge connecting the nearer and further shores.

## 7. Kengeng's Farm *Lesser Full Grain*

During Lesser Full Grain, the eighth solar term, the rice and wheat grains have reached their full size, but they are not yet ripe. At this time farmers pay particular attention to the amount of water in the fields, and increase or decrease it as necessary.

Just as a farmer has to understand that even though the grains appear to have reached maturity, they still have to continue growing, we need to introspect and ask ourselves if our outward appearance and inner state are in accord with one another.

Lesser Full grain, a time to be steady in faith, perseverance, and strength.

Every year in the third lunar month, when it begins to warm up at Kengeng's Farm, the bodhi tree in the Bamboo Grove Hermitage becomes especially lush. It's also at this time of year that the Golden Youth takes a respite from traveling and stays at the Bamboo Grove, where he brings down the nourishing rain of Dharma to irrigate his disciples hearts and minds.

Every time the Golden Youth stays at the Bamboo Grove Hermitage on Kengeng's Farm, without being struck, the old bronze bell in the long corridor begins to ring out its sonorous sound every morning at the break of day. What's even more surprising, every time the bell sounds, there is also heard throughout the farm the following verse:

May the sound of this bell transcend the Dharma realms;  
May it be heard on the Cakravada Mountain and in the nether regions.

May all who hear it become free of defilements and realize truth;

May all beings attain perfect awakening.

As if summoned by the enlightening sound of the bell and verse, the first rays of light vigorously rise up over the horizon and dispel the clouds and fog, leaving the sky bright and beautiful, and rousing Kengeng's Farm from its deep slumber.

Today the Bamboo Grove is filled with people who have come to hear the Dharma. Despite the large number of people, except for the sound of the bell and chanting, the hermitage is silent, for everyone is fully intent on hearing the Dharma.

Passing through the luxuriant bodhi tree, the early morning sunlight illuminates the Golden Youth, who has been sitting cross-legged on the stone platform throughout the night. Just then, the craggy cliff behind the Golden Youth turns into a gloriously radiant Dharma wheel. As it spins, its pure light illuminates the entire grove, giving it the appearance of a pure land, arousing shouts of praise from the assembled audience. Then the Golden Youth recites a marvelous verse:

All things arise due to a cause,  
All things cease due to a cause.

One who would understand samsara,  
Let him from samsara first break free.

Hearing this verse, Yushi spontaneously contemplates its subtle meaning. No sooner does the Golden Youth finish the chanting, than Yushi asks:

“Teacher, you often say that everything arises through the coming together of causes and conditions, and that everything in the material world is nothing but the transformation of the four elements. But how does this differ from what others say about causes and conditions, and about nature?”

“Yushi — ” the august Golden Youth says with his bell-like voice. “When a deluded person speaks about causes and conditions, it’s like dreaming that you are dreaming. Don’t be confused by the vain and puerile ideas such worldly people have about causes and conditions. When I speak of ‘causes and conditions,’ it’s only for the purpose of dispelling the mistaken views people are so stubbornly attached to; it’s not the ultimate truth! Yushi, despite your erudition, you are rather like a physician who has learned the names of all the different medicines, but when they are laid out in front of him, he can’t tell which is which!”

Thereupon, his face red with embarrassment, Yushi falls silent. Apart from the pure ring of the bell reverberating in unison with the leisurely chanting, not a sound is heard.

“Suppose that somebody is digging a well. When he removes a foot of dirt, at the same time there appears a space in the ground one foot deep; the space gradually appears as the dirt is dug up,” says the Golden Youth in his sonorous voice.

Just as Yushi is beginning to feel discombobulated, the Golden Youth continues:

“Yushi, is the space produced from the dirt, or from the digging? Or does it just appear out of thin air?”

“This — ” stutters the tongue-tied Yushi.

“If the space is produced from the digging, then what is produced should be space, and not dirt. If it is produced without a cause, then why was no space seen before the digging began, but only solid earth?” says the Golden Youth before going into further detail:

“Earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness—these seven elements are in a state of original purity, and they permeate the Dharma realm. It’s only in the mind that all manner of distinctions are made.”

Like the thundering sound of a celestial drum, the pure and perfectly penetrating sound of the Dharma resounds in the minds of sentient beings, as a result of which they gradually recognize the world as it really is.

As the sunlight filtering through the dense foliage silently paves the Bamboo Grove with various floral patterns, Yushi desperately attempts to make sense of the Golden Youth’s words.

Seeing Yushi’s consternation, the omniscient and untiring

Golden Youth explains further for the sake of this disciple who has been with him for so long, but has yet to fully comprehend his teachings:

“Yushi, you’ve been practicing for many years, but your mind is still not serene. When people talk about such things as ‘nature’ and ‘causality,’ it’s nothing more than the discriminating mind making mischief. Whatever can be put into words is not ultimate truth. Earth, water, fire, wind, space, perception, and consciousness—these seven elements all return to the Tathagatagarba; they neither arise nor disappear; they embrace the ten directions.”

Liberally sprinkled with the rain of Dharma by the Golden Youth, all those in the assembly gradually come to experience unobstructed bliss, whereupon they feel as though their bodies have become as subtle as motes of dust floating in space, or like ephemeral bubbles drifting on the vast azure ocean. They gradually realize that in this ephemeral universe, only the true mind—so marvelous and bright—is permanent.

Finally, Yushi, nearly weeping, gains a taste of reality. Then he kneels on the ground, puts his palms together in salutation, and utters a verse of jubilation:

Such a profound, steadfast, and serene one,  
A foremost Surangama King is rarely found in the world.  
It has removed my age-old delusions,  
So that I need not pass through untold aeons before realizing

the Dharmakaya.

May I now win the fruit and become an honored king,  
Returning to save beings as numerous as the sands of the  
Ganges.

This profound thought I offer to the countless Buddha lands,  
In gratitude to the Enlightened One.

One night, Yushi is awakened by a light shake. Opening his eyes, he sees a comely young boy who beseeches Yushi to take him to see the legendary stupa on the slope next to the Bamboo Grove. Acceding to the boy's earnest and repeated request, in a mood of exploration, Yushi leads the boy to the white poplar grove outside the village.

Yushi and the boy are the first to cut through the silent morning fog caressing the dew-laden foliage. Skirting the towering white poplars, they cheerfully make their way towards the old stupa on the hillside.

Ever since they arrived at Kengeng's Farm, like a lovely fairy, the legend of the old stupa has continually been with them. Today they are overjoyed, for they finally have a chance to see for themselves what it really looks like.

Hearing this unfamiliar sound, the birds on the treetops begin to chatter. Seemingly informing their companions elsewhere in the forest, soon the silence of early morning gives way to the clear and melodious sound of birdsong. Urged on by the increasingly distinct

shape of the stupa, they quicken their pace.

Reaching the steep slope, they follow the circuitous path paved with yellow leaves and make their way to the stupa standing proud and majestic in the boundless light of dawn.

As Yushi and the boy joyfully circumambulate the stupa and carefully search for traces of the legend, the bright sound of song suddenly rises up:

Searching everywhere in vain,  
A swallow told me:  
“Go forward;  
Up ahead you’ll find a massive man of golden hue,  
Standing tall in the long river of time.”

Captivated by the resonant sound, Yushi stops to listen.

“Hi! Padmaprabha — ” a bright voice suddenly calls out from the fog, whereupon Yushi discovers that the boy has disappeared.

Going forward a few steps, surprised to see two boys standing on a boulder next to the stupa and waving to him, he spontaneously asks:

“Who are you?”

“Yushi, we are disciples of the Golden Youth, just like you,” they say in a genial tone.

As a cool wind blows over the stupa, Yushi looks over the other boy standing on the boulder, taking note of his red cheeks, and

the clump of jade-green grass wet with dew he holds in his hand.

Looking on in amazement at the two boys, he almost forgets his reason for coming to the stupa.

“Yushi, they are Padmaprabha and the Persistent Calyx Boy,” says the Golden Youth, having suddenly appeared next to the stupa.

Gazing at the Golden Youth shrouded in the morning fog and the two boys standing utterly still, Yushi is puzzled. Then the Golden Youth slowly walks over to the stupa, reverently brings his palms together in front on his chest, bows, turns to Yushi, and says:

“Although they are young, Padmaprabha and the Persistent Calyx Boy are wise beyond their years. Does this surprise you? Actually, the six sense faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, and mind—are functionally interchangeable, but few people develop this latent ability. Despite their young age, these two boys have a highly developed sense of synesthesia, and they use it to clearly comprehend all phenomena.”

Pausing, the Golden Youth circumambulates the stupa three times and then continues:

“The reason people fail to obtain real happiness and remain trapped in the endless round samsara, is simply because they are under the control of the six senses!”

With a spark of wisdom in his eyes, Yushi asks:

“How, then, does one attain synesthesia of the six senses?”

“Select one of the six senses and purify it; by doing so, the other five senses will simultaneously be purified, so that they mutually

reinforce each other's purity. This is how to eliminate defilements," explains the Golden Youth.

"How is it that the six senses keep us bound in samsara, but at the same time also provide the way out of samsara?" asks Yushi.

The Golden Youth replies in verse:

The sense organs and their objects are of the same source;  
Bondage and freedom are non-dual.  
The nature of consciousness is empty and false;  
Like flowers floating in space.

"I see, but how does one cultivate one sense so that all six are purified?" asks Yushi, having caught an inkling of the verse's profound meaning.

Following the Golden Youth, talking as they go, they leave the stupa and come to a limpid and calm body of water. Seeing the Golden Youth leisurely step onto a bamboo raft moored on the bank, the two boys follow suit, taking Yushi by the hand with them. Then they take up the bamboo poles and punt the raft out towards the mist in the center of the pool.

As they go along, apart from the swishing of the poles, not a sound is heard.

Suddenly a pair of colorful fish jump out of the water, but before Yushi can get a good look at them, they have already

disappeared into the dark-green depths. Then the Golden Youth picks up an ornate scarf which happens to be on the raft, ties it into a knot, and says:

“Yushi, what is this?”

“It’s a knot,” answers Yushi curiously.

Then the Golden Youth ties another knot in the scarf and asks:

“And what is this?”

“It’s another knot!”

In the cool and moist air, Yushi stirs the water with his hand as he intently watches the Golden Youth tie a total of six knots, each time giving the same answer to the same question. Then the Golden Youth explains:

“These six knots are just like the six senses; if you don’t untangle them, then you’re in for all sorts of trouble. Yushi, how can these six knots be untied?”

“You have to start from the center of the knot; once you undo that part, then you can untie the entire knot,” Yushi says haltingly.

“Do you mean to say that once you undo one of the knots, then you can undo each of the other five?” asks the Golden Youth, as his bright gaze scrutinizes Yushi’s mind.

“That’s right! The knots were tied one by one, so they have to be undone one by one,” Yushi says confidently.

“Indeed, the six senses are the same. That’s why you select one of them as the focus of your practice; once you fully master it, then the defilements are eradicated as a matter of course. Once you’ve

mastered one of the senses, you'll easily master them all."

His discourse completed, the Golden Youth takes the pole from Persistent Calyx Boy and dexterously propels the swaying raft towards a hill covered with forget-me-nots. Standing at the back of the raft, observing the Golden Youth, Yushi contemplates the abstruse principle of synesthesia.

## 8. Zhiyue's Native Place *Grain in Beard*

During Grain in Beard, the ninth solar term, the rice and wheat begin to grow beards or awns. In anticipation of the upcoming hot and damp weather, this is also the time of year when farmers take special care to remove any moisture from their clothes and other fabrics so that they don't get damaged by mold and insects.

Past experience is the best teacher. Yet, once the immediate problem has been solved, the tendency is to forget about the lesson learned.

Grain in Beard, a time to take care; steadfastly guarding the citadel of the mind.

“Look! This world up ahead is filled with high mountains and deep valleys; and the ground is full of deep holes.”

“How strange! There are so many rivers, but they're all so turbid. How can anything survive here?”

This most fortunate group of disciples have always lived in the pure land of the Golden Youth while training under his wise guidance, and thus have never been to any other kind of world. In order to expand their field of vision and breadth of mind, the Golden Youth has asked Zhiyue to take these young disciples on a tour of the western region.

Zhiyue has already taken them to visit quite a few very different worlds. Visiting those worlds created by wise beings has

given them a greater appreciation of the results of wholesome states of mind; but today they have come to visit a very different sort of place.

Having traveled all over the universe, this is the first time they've seen such a peculiar planet. Indeed, it's so dusty that they find it hard to believe that it's a part of the broad and bright galaxy. As they fly past, they eagerly observe and exchange their views about this most peculiar place.

Seeing how fascinated they are, Zhiyue steers her Dharma ship downwards. After skimming through the network of stars, they slowly approach this rough and ragged world.

First the vegetation slowly comes into view, and then all the creatures—squirrels foraging in the trees, fish swimming in the water, colorful butterflies circling the flowers, and many other birds and beasts they have never seen before—some beautiful, others ugly; some happy, others miserable; all relying on the land for their survival.

Puzzled, Yangyu points towards the birds and says:

“In the place where we live and all the other worlds we've visited, I've never seen so many different kinds of creatures—some happy, some miserable—all living in the same place! Just what is this place? And why is it so peculiar?”

Responding to Zhiyue's thoughts, the Dharma ship stops in a concealed spot and then says to Yangyu:

“This place is called the Saha World. These life forms that you see here are not found in other worlds.”

“But why are there so many different life forms in this place?”

In our realm, the land is even and made of lapis lazuli, but this place is so ragged and uneven, and everything is covered with dust. Is there not a single spot here that is clean and pure?” asks Rupya, giving voice to the questions swirling around in the minds of the others.

Again responding to Zhiyue’s thoughts, the Dharma ship sends out a shower of fragrant flowers. Taking up one of the yellow flowers which have landed on the deck, Zhiyue smiles and says:

“As is your aspiration, so is your world! We were born in that pure place as a result of the power of our past vows and the diligent spiritual practice we undertook in our past lives. Indeed, the august and dignified appearance each of us has is also due to our spiritual aspirations and efforts in the past.”

“But will these creatures forever be reborn in such an unfavorable place?” asks Suvarna concernedly.

“Don’t forget the maxim our teacher frequently repeats: “The power of a vow is stronger than even a diamond. The world we live in and our individual circumstances are all of our own making!”

No sooner does Zhiyue finish speaking, than Yangyu hurriedly asks:

“In that case, is there any way for these beings to be reborn in a better place?”

Just then, a powerful wind stirs up a cloud of yellow dust, causing them to close their eyes, whereupon a vigorous verse of praise rises up from the Dharma ship:

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....”

They all look on in amazement as the sound envelops the sand storm and causes each and every mote of dust to settle and disappear. Standing on the side of the ship, seemingly seeing such a remarkable sight for the first time, yet without changing her countenance in the least, Zhiyue continues:

“Although these many creatures have a great variety of shapes and sizes, in one respect they are just like us: they all have the pure, eternal Buddha-nature. And inasmuch as they have the Buddha-nature, they have the potential to attain enlightenment!”

“Be that as it may, why is their lot in life so different from ours?” asks Rupya, still puzzled.

“Rupya, that’s because they live continually burdened by eighty-four thousand types of delusion. As a result, they mistakenly believe that what their eyes see is a precious treasure; it’s the same with whatever they perceive with any of the other senses. Utterly attached to all the things they’ve accumulated life after life, how could they possibly remember that there is a valuable pearl sewn into their lapel?”

“However, anyone who closes the door of delusion and allows the dust of defilement to settle will discover that that brilliant pearl has been there all along. Then it will be possible to break free from all those profitless and entangling mental burdens which have been accumulated over such a long time .....”

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....” is heard as the Dharma ship speedily sets off for an even more distant galaxy. Having inadvertently spilled

over the side of the ship, Zhiyue's exhortation fills the galaxy, and then is silently taken up and woven into the fabric of the universe.

Having caught a glimpse of the secret of the galaxy, these youthful seekers of the way happily anticipate the day when this pure teaching of Zhiyue will permeate all those worlds with which they have an affinity .....

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In the early morning Yushi happily leaves his cave and sees that there was a big snow storm during the night. Somewhat regretful that he didn't move the last peony—about to wither and die—inside the cave before the storm arrived, he decides to see if he can locate it under the snow.

The snow proves to be too deep, but just as he gives up and lifts his head he is taken aback by the majesty of the snowscape, whereupon he spontaneously exclaims, "The snowy mountains are as beautiful as ever!"

As far as the eye can see, everything is covered with snow.

Ever since Yushi went astray and was saved by Zhiyue, the Golden Youth has kept him by his side and has frequently been instructing him so that he might finally be able to clearly differentiate between the real Dharma and the spurious Dharma.

As a result of his ignominious sojourn in the Saha world,

Yushi is no longer conceited about his considerable learning. For he now realizes that erudition is of little significance when it comes to the great matter of finding the way out of samsara, and how easy it was for him to get snared in the Kapila Incantation.

Armed with this new perspective, he stays close by the Golden Youth, serving him and requesting him to resolve any doubts he may have.

After many years, the Golden Youth sees that the time is right for Yushi to temporarily put aside all his duties and undertake a period of intensive solitary practice. For this purpose he sends him to the eastern summit of the snowy mountains, a place so high and cold that even the birds find it forbidding.

After staying there for some years and observing the transformations of nature, he gradually matures in his practice and gains insight into the profound Dharma.

Over the past half month a very subtle feeling has been lingering in his mind, at times quite distinctly. Although he would like to get a hold of it and make it more explicit, he can't quite put his finger on it. Now thoroughly intrigued by this feeling, he has decided to go all out to get to the bottom of it.

Although lots of new snow fell through the night and it's still bitterly cold, for some reason, after not appearing for a long time, the sun has finally returned to the eastern summit, giving the morning sky a bright countenance.

As if embarrassed about suddenly reappearing after such a long absence, the sun coyly hides behind a cloud, from where it continues to emit its golden rays. As Yushi slowly steps on the broken bits of golden light and admires how the sunlight is reflected by the snow, he feels the sun warming his heart.

Before long, the sunlight decisively dispels the lingering grey clouds, leaving the sky with a fresh, blue appearance. Yushi is incomparably happy as he observes the golden rays of the morning sun up the snowy mountains.

As though the refulgent sunlight is also dispelling the clouds of ignorance from his heart, that intriguing feeling comes welling up again.

Spontaneously following the sunlight, he unexpectedly comes to a glen where a small stream has begun to trickle. Tracing its source, he climbs up a small slope and suddenly discovers the spot where the snow and ice is being melted by the sun.

At that very moment he recalls the words of the Golden Youth:

“The wonderful awakening is in the mind. Defilements are adventitious; like the wind blowing through space, or like a knife cutting through water, they don’t meet any resistance. The wonderful awakening is like boiling soup, and the defilements are like solid ice; as the warm air gradually draws near, the ice naturally melts.”

As the sunlight silently melts the snow and ice, Yushi stands captivated next to the water and meticulously observes the chunks of ice jostling about in the water.

The melting of the snow and ice is the only sound to be heard in the glen. Then it dawns on Yushi that for nature there is no dissemblance whatsoever. After some time, he suddenly smiles and says to himself:

“I finally understand!”

Guided by his newly gained insight, Yushi leisurely goes to the snow cave he’s been living in for a number of years, retrieves the treasured bodhi-tree seeds he’s received from the Golden Youth, and prepares to plant them in the relatively warm and fertile soil uncovered by the melting snow.

But in his joy, he has forgotten that even though the snow has begun to melt, only if the sunlight is sufficiently strong and continuous will the ice and snow melt completely.

Too overjoyed to clearly consider all this, just as he is about to cast the seeds onto the semi-frozen ground, the Golden Youth’s voice comes forth from the chilly water:

“Yushi! The opportune moment has not yet arrived! A taste of enlightenment does not amount to full awakening. Although the sun has come out, it’s still not strong enough to completely melt the snow.”

Bathed in sunlight, Yushi observes the peaks of the snowy mountains rising up into the bright sky, like images in the water or reflections in a mirror, real yet unreal. Then he sees the Golden Youth seated on a golden cloud, tirelessly guiding him with a mind of boundless compassion.

## 9. The Golden Youth · Ganlu *Summer Solstice*

The first day of Summer Solstice, the tenth solar term, is the longest day of the year; it's also the day on which the sun is at its strongest. In China the observance of the Summer Solstice predates all other annual festivals, and in ancient times was celebrated with sumptuous feasts in both the north and the south. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, on the Summer Solstice farming families customarily offered a sacrifice of alcohol and meat to the agricultural deities so as to ensure a good harvest in the fall.

Summer Solstice, long days, life thrives. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

Conforming to the turning of the four seasons, heaven and earth play out the eternal game of arising and passing away. In all times and places there have been certain people of indomitable spirit who have sought to attain self-mastery and transcend the limited human condition by giving up material pursuits and comforts and setting out on a journey through the realm of the spirit.

“Just where is that Mount Sumeru?” Zhiyue asks herself, beleaguered by cold and hunger, gazing ahead at the peaks that keep getting higher and higher.

Zhiyue was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. One time she happened to go to the Bamboo Grove Hermitage, where she heard the Golden Youth giving a Dharma talk. As a result, she began to strive

to overcome the five types of sensual desire, find her path in life, and discover her original face.

Although that was the only time she personally heard the Golden Youth teach the Dharma, she was so deeply impressed by his incomparably august appearance that ever since then his image has stayed with her, constantly inspiring her to overcome the defilements.

As a result of diligent practice over the course of time, the dusty pearl hidden away in the modest Zhiyue's heart has steadily brightened.

In the course of traveling far and wide while seeking her path in life, Zhiyue has come to realize that there is a tremendous amount of suffering in the world. As a result, she has vowed to dedicate her life to benefiting sentient beings, for which purpose she plans to build a Dharma ship in which she will travel about and assist all who need a helping hand.

Presently, however, she feels an increasingly pressing need to visit the Golden Youth once again, to seek his guidance in dealing with a very subtle vexation which recurs from time to time for no apparent reason.

After tirelessly searching all over for the Golden Youth, she finally learns that he is staying on the summit of Mount Sumeru in the Lotus Treasury, and immediately sets off in that direction.

On the way, she continually hears that Mount Sumeru is accessible only to those who have an abundance of wisdom, virtue, and merit. Although Zhiyue doesn't have an overly high estimation of

her spiritual accomplishments, she is steadfast in her determination to seek guidance from the Golden Youth. Disregarding all obstacles, she carries on her way.

Reaching Mount Sumeru has become her central mission in life.

By now she has undergone innumerable hardships in her search, but Mount Sumeru is still nowhere in sight. Yet, as she looks back into the distance at all the verdant mountains and deep valleys she's already traversed, she is wholly confident that, inasmuch as she is utterly sincere in her vow to find Mount Sumeru, then as soon as the conditions are right, she will surely find it.

After walking all day through the mountains and finally managing to make her way out of a valley thickly spread with brambles, Zhiyue arrives at a high mountain full of ancient trees towering into the heavens. Now exhausted, she leans against an old pine and enters a state of wistful contemplation as she peers out on peaks illuminated by the oblique rays of the setting sun.

Without her noticing, the wind has silently blown down the black mantle of night, whereupon the mountain appears mysterious and forbidding. Groping around in the dark, she finds some dry grass, spreads it out on the cold, damp ground, sits down cross-legged, closes her eyes, and rejuvenates her energy before continuing her journey.

When the temperature begins to quickly drop, Zhiyue knows that it's time to carry on. As she looks up, she sees the large and

bright stars forming into meteor showers rushing down between the mountains, making such a cacophony that she instantly stands up.

Overjoyed, she silently puts her hands in the dhyana mudra and chants:

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....

As the meteor shower continues, Zhiyue goes on chanting with such concentration and sincerity that she enters into a brilliant realm free of obstructions .....

“Zhiyue, I’m so happy that you have returned. Quick, come with me.”

Opening her eyes, she sees a familiar-looking young man standing in front of a huge mirror alternatively reflecting every kind of scene imaginable. As if meeting an old friend, he takes her by the hand and leads her towards a bamboo forest to the right side of the mirror.

Still chanting, Zhiyue follows the youth along a winding path through the bamboos. She soon hears the sound of chanting, carried from afar by a meandering stream covered with fallen flowers.

“Do you remember this splendid sound?” asks the youth, looking back with a perspicacious expression.

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....” As the sonorous sound intermingles with Zhiyue’s silent recitation, she is infused with an incomparable joy, as if she were about to fly up into the sky. Thereupon she happily nods in agreement and thinks to herself:

“This place sure does seem familiar.”

After coming out of the bamboo forest dappled with wavering shadows, they arrive at a garden full of flowers falling in riotous profusion.

The garden is planted with a great variety of flowers and plants emitting a glittering light and producing a celestial sound.

Carried by the gentle breeze, as they land on the spotless ground, the flowers give off an exquisite musical tone perfectly in time with the resonant chanting permeating the garden. Standing in that enchanting sea of flowers, as the lilting sound of the chanting permeates her every pore, all her extraneous thoughts spontaneously fall away, as if in a state of deep samadhi.

Suddenly, a brilliant light comes shooting down from the sky, ray upon ray entering into the plants and flowers, causing them to give off various hues of light. Just then, a net woven with glittering golden light forms in the sky over the garden, sending out a stream of brilliant light which enters Zhiyue's eyes and heart; she gradually comes to feel as though her entire body is transparent. Then an unsurpassable sense of bliss descends upon her, clearing away all the defilements that she has been burdened by since beginningless time.

While enrapt in that state of bliss, Zhiyue suddenly sees a stately world slowly emerging from within the brilliant sea of flowers—the Golden Youth teaching the Dharma in a wild garden full of blooming flowers, surrounded by a large number of familiar-looking disciples, including the youth who brought her there moments ago, now gesturing to her to quickly draw near.

As she approaches, she wonders how it could be possible that a short while ago she was on a pitch-dark mountain searching for Mount Sumeru, but now has suddenly arrived in this marvelous place. Concluding that she must be dreaming, she comes to a sudden halt.

“Zhiyue, hurry up; the Golden Youth is about to start his talk!” calls out a young boy wearing two pigtails, sitting to the right of the Golden Youth.

Moved by the earnestness in the boy’s voice, Zhiyue musters up her courage and asks:

“What is this place?”

“Zhiyue, what are you saying?” says the boy, his face full of surprise.

At a loss as to what to do, she wonders:

“I’d better get out of here and try to find Mount Sumeru.”

Just as she is turning around to leave, she hears the Golden Youth’s familiar voice:

“Zhiyue, you have never once left Mount Sumeru; where could you possibly go to find it!”

Just then, fragrant and limpid springs come bubbling up all around and a great many lovely and rare birds come flying over, briskly chanting the Buddha’s name and the scriptures.

“Wow! That’s eight-virtue water and those are kalavinka birds!”

Thereupon Zhiyue wakes up and discovers that she is seated next to Kengeng listening to the Golden Youth giving detailed

instructions on how to recollect the Buddha and recite his name.

After rubbing her eyes and taking a stealthy look at Kengeng listening intently to the talk, she shamefully realizes that she must have dozed off.

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“You’ve been in the Saha World for so many years now; it looks like it’s now time to go back!” the Golden Youth says while lightly stroking the old bodhi tree at the front of the courtyard.

“Zhiyue, beat the Dharma drum and blow the Dharma conch; it’s time for an assembly,” says the Golden Youth before walking over to the teacher’s platform.

Zhiyue does as instructed.

“Hurry up! The Dharma drum and Dharma conch have been sounded. The Teacher is going to give a talk.”

Summoned by the sound of the drum and conch, all the disciples eagerly rush over to the place where the Golden Youth regularly gives his teachings.

For some reason, today the decorative plants bordering the platform have lost some of their vigor, and the nearby waterfall is not its boisterous self.

Seeing all this as rather odd, a sense of apprehension spreads amongst the disciples. Noticing the unusually solemn expression on the Teacher’s face, nobody says a word as they silently find a seat.

“Sons and Daughters, all conditioned things are impermanent; meeting is necessarily followed by separation. Just so, the time has come for me to leave this place, and tonight at midnight I will depart. After my departure, carry on with diligence; don’t be remiss!”

Hearing the Golden Youth’s announcement, an icy chill sweeps through the assembly.

“Teacher! We are not yet well established on the path. Out of compassion, please continue to guide us in the practice!”

“Hear, hear! Without your guidance, how will we be able to deal with all the obstacles that we encounter?”

As the distraught disciples beseech the Golden Youth to stay, those of a timid nature begin to shed tears. Seeing that everyone in the assembly is overcome with grief, the Golden Youth says in a tone of consolation:

“You’ve been listening to my teachings for so long now, you ought to clearly understand that meeting is inevitably followed by separation. As long as you carry on with diligence, then we will surely come together again at some future time, just like now.”

“This is all too much for me .....” laments Suvana.

“All my hopes are dashed to pieces,” says a young novice with a grave demeanor.

“Without your guidance, we are sure to deviate from the true path .....” laments the teary-faced Yushi, who has been the Golden Youth’s faithful attendant ever since he was a boy.

“As long as you keep the teaching well in mind and practice

just as I've taught you, then all obstacles can be overcome," consoles the Golden Youth.

Even the plants and flowers surrounding the teacher's dais appear dejected, as if lamenting that they shall no longer be able to imbibe the Golden Youth's nourishing rain of Dharma. Sitting around the dais, the disciples are overcome with trepidation as they steadily gaze at the Golden Youth, fearing that their august teacher may vanish at any moment.

As the slanting rays of the sun slowly give way to dusk, struck by the great sorrow overcoming the assembly, Zhiyue struggles to find a way to ameliorate their sorrow.

All of a sudden, the vigorous yet sublime sound of chanting comes flooding out of the sky and towards the dais. Thereupon the dais miraculously transforms into an endless stream of stars surging forth.

Even more remarkable, inside each star can be seen a stately world wherein the Golden Youth is vigorously expounding the Dharma in various guises and languages.

Personally witnessing this extraordinary sight, the disciples are filled with yearning for these incomparably beautiful worlds and forget all about the Golden Youth's imminent departure. But just as they begin to conceive the thought of entering into those lovely worlds, they all gather up and form into a giant lotus. At the same moment, a glittering stream of water comes flowing down from the Milky Way and forms a sacred fragrant ocean around each of those stately worlds.

Within those innumerable worlds surrounded by boundless fragrant seas, there continually appear small replica worlds of various types.

Even more amazing is the sight of the Golden Youth nonchalantly seated on a purple-gold lotus slowly floating towards the center of each world.

“Buried in the dust of the world are to be found innumerable scriptures. All you have to do is clear away the dust, and you will come into possession of a priceless treasury of wisdom. Sons and Daughters, for every result there is a cause! All sentient beings are endowed with a pure self-nature. All you need to do is practice diligently and conquer the defilements; then you will obtain the same ability I have to appear anywhere, in any guise, and to turn the Wheel of the Dharma amidst the dust of the world,” says the Golden Youth to his disciples, so as to bring them out of their reverie.

“In other worlds too, I teach the same doctrine of separation. When the conditions are right, we will meet again.” The Golden Youth’s words break through the disciple’s confusion, and they suddenly come out of their stupor.

Then the Golden Youth disappears from the dais, as does the phantasmagoria of beautiful worlds and the apprehension which had been gripping the disciples’ minds.

They are all consoled by the thought that they will surely meet the Golden Youth again.

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“Ganlu ..... Ganlu .....”

The auspicious and serene sacred name slowly floats through the vast space between heaven and earth. Abruptly opening his eyes as his heart flutters with fear, Yangyu discovers that he is not at all injured and that he’s comfortably lying down in a grassy meadow below a pair of pine trees giving off a pleasant scent.

Trying to forget about the frightful incident, Yangyu lies motionless and closely follows the sacred sound riding in on the wind. Before long, two lovely maidens holding bunches of budding flowers leisurely walk up to Yangyu and hand him several flowers moist with dew. Surprised, Yangyu asks:

“I say, young ladies; What is this place?”

“This is Lebang,” replies one of the smiling maidens, gracefully attired in a long gown, then asking:

“And where, may I ask, have you come from?”

“Actually, I don’t know. You see, I was brought here by a red-crowned crane.”

“A red-crowned crane!” exclaims the slightly older maiden, as though she is about to tell him something. Before she can, however, they hear the sound of wind-bells ringing in the distance, whereupon they wave goodbye to Yangyu and excitedly run off.

Curious, Yangyu walks in the direction whence the ringing came, and before long comes to a large lotus pond filled with budding

lotus flowers. Delighted, he walks along the edge of the pond and admires the bashful lotus buds.

Suddenly a delightful wind blows up from the pond, whereupon the sound of innumerable musical instruments comes down from the sky and merges with the hushed tones of the pond and the wind. As if performing a graceful waltz, the jade-green lotus leaves sway in the wind, while the spellbound Yangyu looks on.

Soon misty clouds silently rise up from the pond and prop up an especially plump lotus bud. Unable to hold back his curiosity, just as Yangyu decides to draw near for a closer look, the ground shakes, splashing the bud with glittering drops of water, whereupon the bud suddenly bursts open, releasing a lovely nimbus.

Inside the nimbus Yangyu sees various scenes from his innumerable past lives. Overwhelmed by the sight of so much joy and so much sorrow, he is soon soaked in perspiration.

“Yangyu, you have come at last!”

The Golden Youth, of consummate appearance and endowed with all the auspicious marks of a great man, kindly calls out to Yangyu, extricating him from the entangling past, and bringing him back to the present.

“Wow! It’s the red-crowned crane!” calls out Yangyu, happily surprised at the sight of the same crane which came to his rescue at that critical moment, now gracefully standing next to the Golden Youth.

“Do you still remember your past lives?”

His attention now riveted on the Golden Youth's question, looking ashamed but wide awake, Yangyu walks over to him and asks:

“Why do I wallow in that evil world tainted with the five turbidities?”

Gesturing towards a purple-gold lotus which has just bloomed, the Golden Youth says in a kindly voice:

“As with all the other beings in the evil world tainted with the five turbidities, because you are so attached to your loved ones and have such strong habits of mind, you sow all sorts of negative karma which inevitably bears bitter fruit. However, if you are fortunate enough to encounter wholesome conditions, then one utterly pure thought is enough to transform evil into goodness, and turn suffering into enlightenment. Yangyu, do you remember that this is the lotus pond in which all beings have planted a beautiful lotus?”

Impeccably august in appearance, the Golden Youth's admonition makes a deep impression on Yangyu's mind.

“It is a fine line which divides the hell realms and the Buddha lands. Evil is empty by nature. The moment you let go, you will find that flourishing purple-golden lotus.”

As he deeply ponders the Golden Youth's words, Yangyu mislays the flowers given to him by the maidens.

Clouds unbounded   water crystalline,  
Endless mountains, roads by darkness obscured.  
Wind slows   rain abates,

A weary bird returns to its tree.

Birdsong in the wee hours a traveler's pure voice,  
Once in search of green grass now tracing the fallen flowers.

Spring dream unscathed body twisted like duckweed,  
In the east a hedge of yellow chrysanthemum in the west a window  
and affection for the old garden.

Lotus leaves flat lotus flowers upright,  
Born of the mud flourishing in the mire.

Spring water turbid down low up high running clear,  
Falling flowers, eternal spring clouds disperse, moonlight appears.

*Amrita* 

## *Chapter 3*



## Chapter 3

### 10. The Lord of the Five Aggregates · The Primacy of the Mind *Lesser Heat*

During Lesser Heat, the eleventh solar term, the weather is already hot, but not yet at its hottest. A mildly hot Lesser Heat followed by a scorchingly hot Greater Heat indicates that the coming harvest will be a good one. On the contrary, if Lesser Heat is too hot, then the grains will be fragile; and if Greater Heat is not hot enough, this indicates that there will be an excess of rain and snow the following winter.

Lesser Heat, skilfully wielding the sword of wisdom, sufficient for cutting off the defilements.

The seasons roll on, and it is now the most enchanting time of year on the lovely Silkworm Island. Undulating in the wind, the fresh green mulberry leaves appear like so many waves on the ocean. Mulberries, plump and dark red, imbibe the fresh nutriments from the air, enriching the Island's inherent charm. Attracted by the sweet mulberries, the birds and squirrels lend the jade-green orchards even greater vitality and vigor.

Bright and early, Zhiyue is awakened by the excited chatter of squirrels.

Having met them at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, the wise Zhiyue and courageous Kengeng have left a deep impression on

Satana. Ever since then, she has frequently invited them to visit the mysterious Silkworm Island, and she and Zhiyue have become close friends.

Over time, Zhiyue has come to discover that Satana's irresistible charm comes from her intelligence and beauty, as well as her childlike innocence. In light of Satana's sincerity and kindness, at times Zhiyue can't help but wonder if she might be the owner of the lotus petal who fled from Lebang.

Zhiyue and Kengeng are both deeply concerned about the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates they heard in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, and are eager to find out if it is indeed a manifestation of the Lord of the Five Aggregates. Although they've been discreetly looking into it, as yet they haven't found a single clue. For her part, Satana seems quite oblivious to the lurking danger, and Zhiyue is worried about her.

Every time she meets the optimistic Satana, Zhiyue feels at a loss as to what to do. Satana has again invited Zhiyue and Kengeng to visit Silkworm Island, and this time they are intent on finally finding out where the Lord of the Five Aggregates is lurking, so that Satana won't come to any harm.

Just before dawn, Ayou jumps out of bed and peers out through the long windows at the dim sky, before slowly opening the door and following the narrow path lined with dandelions.

Her lingering grogginess now expelled by the chilly morning

breeze, Ayou hums a cheerful tune as she lithely makes her way through the mulberry orchard. Just then, a salty wind comes up from the sea. Invigorated by the familiar aroma, she trots ahead with greater speed, eager to jump into the sea.

Soon reaching the tranquil shore, not a soul in sight, she is greeted by the familiar misty breeze. Going down to the spindrift, she takes up the water in her cupped hands, sprinkles it on herself, and “splash —” she plunges into the deep sea.

This is Ayou’s favorite season of the whole year, and she regards it as a special gift from heaven. For she takes much delight in going out every morning just before sunrise for a brisk dip in the welcoming waters surrounding Silkworm Island. Just as the golden sun begins to yawn and the clouds hugging the horizon take on a multitude of warm hues, Ayou gracefully floats on the surface of the gently undulating sea, basking in the first rays of sunlight to her heart’s content.

Day in and day out, she imbibes the essence of the rising sun as a way of nourishing all the cells in her body and replenishing her youthful vigor.

As a way of preserving her youthful beauty, Ayou regularly dives down to the seabed to collect pearls. Quite by accident, she has discovered that the waters off the coast of Silkworm Island contain a large number of rare black pearls, which she uses to treat Satana’s back pain and also to enhance her own health. This is why she regularly follows up her morning swim and sun-bath with a dive to the bottom

of the sea.

Ayou finds today's weather particularly agreeable. As the rays of sunlight skip about on the surface of the sea, she playfully swims on the golden waves and then plunges to the seabed to search for pearls.

Taking a leisurely stroll, Zhiyue arrives at the beach. Thoroughly enjoying the cool ocean breeze, she walks barefoot on the sand before sitting down and concentrating on the sound of the sea.

After some time, Zhiyue opens her eyes and observes the pulsating golden waves. Thereupon she unexpectedly sees Ayou come swimming up from the depths. After making her way onto the surf, Ayou looks down as if searching for something. Curious, Zhiyue walks towards her.

Having thoroughly enjoyed her customary morning swim, Ayou was about to hurry back and give Satana some red pearls she has found, when her attention was drawn to some beautiful seashells on the beach. Like a child hunting for hidden treasure, she eagerly picks up and inspects the shells. Silkworm Island is free of pollution and the beaches are full of seashells and hermit crabs. Ayou has always been fond of seashells, for she believes that each one harbors a beautiful aspiration. She enjoys collecting them and putting them to her ear to hear the sound of the sea.

Ayou is so enrapt by her discovery that she doesn't hear a thing when Zhiyue calls out to her several times. Then Zhiyue walks up to her and taps her on the shoulder.

Finally coming back to her senses, she sees Zhiyue standing next to her, smiles, and excitedly hands this distinguished guest of Santana a small but exquisite seashell, announcing:

“The seashells here are especially abundant and beautiful. If you come here often, you’re sure to find a treasure!”

Then Ayou continues scouring the beach for shells, at the same time telling Zhiyue all about herself and the ocean.

Under the first rays of the morning sun, the delicate footprints in a meandering line left by Zhiyue and Ayou in the moist, cool sand look like a string of lovely copper bells. Some are deep and remain distinct; some are washed away by the spindrift; others slowly collapse and become indistinct.

“Zhiyue — Zhiyue — ” Suddenly Satana’s bright voice is heard coming from the distance.

“Today the weather is so nice; I’d like to take you and Kengeng to see a secret spring,” Satana says to Zhiyue in a loud voice. The excitement in Satana’s voice makes Zhiyue eager to hear about the plan.

“Ayou, you’re gathering seashells again,” says Satana in a matter-of-fact way. Then she turns to Zhiyue and says enthusiastically:

“I’ll bet you’ve never seen such a beautiful mountain spring before!”

Zhiyue can’t help but smile.

After walking with her for a while, Zhiyue has discovered that Ayou’s fondness for seashells borders on an obsession. For Zhiyue,

however, what's really interesting about these seashells is not so much their beauty, but the way in which they gestate a precious life form.

“Zhiyue, let's hurry back; we mustn't keep Kengeng waiting!”

Satana says before turning to Ayou and saying:

“Ayou, you'd better go back as well; you'll never be able to collect every shell on the beach!”

“Don't wait for me. Today the seashells are especially interesting,” says Ayou, looking up for a moment before continuing to scour the beach.

Seeing how enamored Ayou is with seashells, Zhiyue spontaneously says:

“Ayou, do you know that every time you add a shell to your collection there is one more homeless hermit crab on the beach?”

Appearing rather perplexed, Ayou looks at Zhiyue for a moment and says in a tone of disappointment:

“Zhiyue, it seems that you don't share my interest in these lovely shells.”

Seeing that Ayou hasn't caught her drift, Zhiyue smiles, content to let Ayou carry on her merry way. Thereupon Satana flashes an understanding smile and says:

“Ayou is like that.”

Then she leads Zhiyue towards the here residence in the Mulberry Grove.

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It's now the fifth month of the lunar calendar, the time of year when the bountiful harvest on Silkworm Island presents an extraordinary sight. Colorful birds, apparently fancying themselves the owners of the island, chirp and cavort on the branches laden with bright red mulberries and enjoy a luscious snack, as if eager to flaunt their good fortune.

Blowing in from all directions, playing the soothing song of nature, the refreshingly cool ocean breeze leaves not a single spot on the island untouched.

As she leads Zhiyue and Kengeng to the mysterious spring, Satana introduces the various points of interest along the way, as though she were enumerating her family heirlooms. She also relates how she transformed the once-barren and desolate island into a thriving center of silk production.

As Zhiyue listens to Satana's fervent descriptions, she also makes subtle inquiries, for she is constantly wondering if this lovely young lady could in fact be the owner of the lotus petal who fled from the Pure Land, as well as where the Lord of the Five Aggregates might be hiding. Hoping to warn Satana about the hidden danger, Zhiyue puts forth all sorts of hints, but all to no avail—for Satana simply doesn't pick up on what she is getting at. After some time, Zhiyue can't help but sigh and say to herself:

"This magic spell of the Lord of the Five Aggregates is powerful indeed; even someone as intelligent as Satana is subject to its wiles."

In light of Zhiyue's grandmotherly kindness, apart from providing occasional help, Kengeng mainly just quietly listens as Satana excitedly tells them all about her plans.

After walking along for some time while listening to Satana's enthusiastic descriptions of all the wonderful sights, they finally arrive at the center of the island, and start ascending towards a precipitous peak.

“Oh — How fragrant!”

When they reach the verdant base of the peak, a peculiar aroma fills the air. Gazing up at the peak, flashing a mischievous smile, as if she is privy to some secret, Satana says to Kengeng:

“This is the fragrance of an ancient red sandalwood tree.”

“But what is such a rare tree doing in such a precipitous place?” Zhiyue asks in wonderment.

Taking a seat on a rock, Satana says with an affected air of mystery:

“This mountain peak is much too steep for red sandalwood trees; yet, the scent of red sandalwood is continually found in this place.” Pleased to see that her two listeners are highly intrigued, Satana continues:

“On Silkworm Island there is an eccentric woman named Shuye who knows all about using the scent of red sandalwood. Shuye is very fond of prayer, and very good at it. All her life she has been in the habit of frequently going deep into the mountains to pray at pristine places with a waterfall. Normally, she is very rational

and sober-minded, but whenever she comes upon an ancient tree, a towering peak, or an odd-looking rock, a strange transformation comes over her and she reverently pays homage to it. Sometimes she makes a great effort to collect all sorts of fragrant flowers and herbs, and then places them in front of the tree, peak, or rock as an act of reverence. Then she lights up some ancient red sandalwood, enters into a state of deep concentration, and begins to pray round-the-clock.

“What does she pray for?” asks Zhiyue, highly intrigued.

“Of course, she prays that all her wishes come true!” Satana wittily replies, though seeming to concede that people are simply the way they are. Standing up, she takes a few deep whiffs of the brisk aroma of the red sandalwood, and excitedly says:

“Let’s go! Now that we’ve found the scent of the red sandalwood, we’re sure to find Shuye, or at least one of the places where she goes to pray.”

Thoroughly intrigued by all this, Zhiyue and Kengeng follow Satana as she excitedly leads them further into the mountains. On the way, Satana eagerly tells them how Shuye taught her how to pray for blessings, as well as her own experience of practicing prayer.

As they go deeper into the mountains, the sandal-scented air becomes cooler, and they begin to feel that they are in the midst of some irresistible force.

Seeing that Satana is quite familiar with the way, Zhiyue and Kengeng confidently follow her along the narrow mountain path strewn with strange flowers, passing by silent lakes occasionally

embellished with the graceful sound of birdsong. Just as they find that they are now deep in the mountains, they hear the rumbling of water, whereupon Satana turns to them and says:

“Just ahead is the mysterious spring; no doubt Shuye is praying next to the waterfall.”

After continuing for some distance on a curving path bounded by stalagmites, they suddenly see a towering waterfall crashing down with great momentum from the face of a cloud-shrouded cliff; a semi-circular rainbow glimmers in the waterfall’s misty midsection. Next to the base of the waterfall, they see a young woman with a skillfully tied chignon, her palms together in front of her chest, eyes tightly closed, and sitting motionlessly on a boulder while muttering incantations.

“That’s Shuye. Just as I guessed, she’s come here to pray! Let’s quietly go off to one side so that we don’t disturb her. For if anyone interrupts her prayer, she can become seriously annoyed,” Satana whispers before gingerly leading Zhiyue and Kengeng towards the right side of the waterfall.

Kengeng, however, has little interest in Shuye and her prayers, and as Satana excitedly explains all about it in a hushed tone, he just looks around and enjoys the scenery. For her part, Zhiyue also doesn’t see much value in Shuye’s prayers, but feigns interest nonetheless, hoping to find a chance to give Satana some guidance. Thus she patiently accompanies Satana and closely observes Shuye, waiting for an opportune time to speak.

After remaining as still as a statue for quite some time,

Shuye finally begins to stir, first lowering her hands and then lightly massaging her body, whereupon Satana calls out to her. Looking around, Shuye is startled to see Santana along with two strangers. However, she soon regains her composure, whereupon she stands up, gracefully greets Satana with a bow, and says:

“Just now I was praying for you, so that everything goes according to your wishes.”

“Thank you so much, Shuye. Come; I want to introduce you to my good friends, Zhiyue and Kengeng. Why don’t you tell them about the wonders of prayer?”

Finding out that they are Satana’s guests, Shuye proudly makes a brief explanation of her prayer practice, and then proceeds to tell Satana all the details regarding her recent achievements in prayer.

Hearing all this, Zhiyue becomes concerned that Shuye is only going to make Satana even more confused, and spontaneously says to Shuye:

“Actually, it’s better to use the eyes to appreciate all the natural beauty in the world. What’s called the ‘interaction of empathy and response’ doesn’t necessarily require closing your eyes and sitting motionlessly! Shuye, why don’t you try opening your eyes, closely observing the wonderful scenery, and then praying with your heart?”

Rather embarrassed by Zhiyue’s suggestion, Shuye remains silent. Satana, however, is intrigued and spontaneously asks Zhiyue:

“I’ve always been under the impression that it’s not necessary to use the eyes when praying. So why do you suggest that Shuye ought

to open her eyes and admire the scenery?”

“Satana, this world is so beautiful and sublime. If you close your eyes and pray without paying any attention to it, you may attain some temporary happiness and peace, but as far as this world is concerned, such results are meaningless,” Zhiyue says to the intelligent yet naïve Satana. “The power of prayer and vows comes from the heart; what you do with your eyes isn’t that important!”

“Wow — ” exclaims Satana reflectively.

Regaining her wits, Shuye quibbles:

“As I see it, because the world is so beautiful, when your eyes are open, it’s so enticing that it’s hard to concentrate the mind. That’s why it’s better to keep your eyes closed.”

“To be sure, the world is full of sights, but they are not inveigling by nature. If the eye is affected by them, this only indicates that the heart is not well trained. And if the heart is not well trained, how can prayer be effective?”

All the while retaining her mild composure, Zhiyue has hit the nail on the head, leaving Shuye dumbstruck.

As the darkness gradually envelops the trees, mountains, and waterfall, Satana suddenly notices the time, and urges Shuye to quickly prepare to leave so that they can descend the mountain before nightfall.

## **11. Satana's Chronic Ailment** *Greater Heat*

Greater Heat, the twelfth solar term, is the hottest time of year. Because germs also rapidly multiply in the hot weather, this is also the season when an epidemic is most likely to break out. In the event that an epidemic continues unabated for a long time, during Greater Heat people living along the sea coast will construct a vessel known as a “Greater Heat boat” and send it out to sea as a way of expelling the gods of pestilence.

Greater Heat, the time to cultivate virtue and leave behind the plague of desire.

Standing barefoot on the level field, Pomo looks as if she wants to take the vast Milky Way and place it in her heart. Again and again, she takes in a deep breath of fresh air and then expels all the stale air from her entire body.

After completing one hundred eight repetitions, Pomo finally feels completely pure and bright in body and mind. Following a few light stretches, she begins to make a detailed observation of the constellations.

When summer draws near, the magnanimous Milky Way welcomes the countless stars which come to linger on its silvery path and gaze out on endless space.

Using astrology to predict the future is Pomo's greatest pride and joy.

Pomo has always had a keen interest in the stars. Even as a little girl, every time the stars began to shine bright up in the early evening sky, she was overcome with a strange feeling. To indulge her fancy, she would often hide away in some quiet, out-of-the-way place, and proceed to explore that mysterious universe of stars. What's more, whenever she discovered what seemed to her to be an especially interesting group of stars, she would invent a colorful story about them.

When she got a bit older she learned to practice divination, which she took up with such zeal that she soon collected every book on the subject. After mastering the essence of all the different schools of divination, Pomo then developed a unique system of her own. Utterly devoted to her quest, after accumulating a great wealth of knowledge and experience, she finally succeeded in uncovering the secrets of the heavenly bodies. Now she uses astrology and divination to control various natural phenomena and predict a person's fate. Equipped with such incomparable ability, Pomo is highly sought after and idolized by all those eager to know what the future has in store for them.

Many years ago an august and kind elder made a great effort to invite Pomo to come and stay on Silkworm Island. Pomo was quite pleased to have her talents recognized by the elder, and as an expression of her gratitude she has been using all her divination skills

to determine the cause of and best treatment for the chronic back pain of his beloved granddaughter, Satana. As it turns out, the pure and mysterious natural environment of Silkworm Island has enhanced Pomo's sensitivity and skills. The almond-eyed Pomo always carries a divination stick made of bone, and due to her uncanny ability to use it to foretell the future and read people's minds, she is widely held in awe. What's more, Pomo has become a key advisor in Satana's commercial empire.

Half a month ago Pomo noticed that several exceedingly bright stars suddenly appeared on the margins of the Milky Way, and that they were moving towards the star sign Satana belongs to. Despite her vast knowledge of astrology, after observing these stars for ten days in a row, Pomo is still unable to determine whether they are a good omen or a bad one.

This group of stars with no fixed abode is making Pomo feel ill at ease. Every night she takes up a new vantage point and painstakingly looks on as these anomalous stars draw ever closer to Satana's star sign. Having decided that the best approach would be to first rid her mind of the obstructions which have been dogging her lately, and then approaching her investigation with a fresh mind, tonight she has come to a wide-open meadow. After using deep breathing to settle her mind, she enters into a state of deep concentration and then proceeds to one-pointedly observe the stars.

After dinner Satana goes out and looks up at the night sky laden with glittering stars, and then decides to invite Kengeng and Zhiyue to go for a walk in the refreshing evening breeze.

The summer nights on Silkworm Island are graced with the delightful sounds of frogs croaking, cicadas buzzing, and fireflies happily carrying their tiny lanterns all about. After putting so much effort into using modern technology to beautify Silkworm Island, Satana rarely takes the opportunity to enjoy the island's many natural wonders. But tonight, as she goes around with Zhiyue and Kengeng, she finds it all highly interesting.

While learning so much nature-lore from the normally reticent Kengeng, Satana is full of praise and questions. Walking along as they talk, they soon find themselves quite some distance from the villa, at a pristine meadow completely free of the trappings of modern civilization.

After walking for some time, their words are suddenly interrupted by a rhythmic sound intermittently carried near by the evening breeze.

“Kengeng, what’s that sound?” asks the puzzled Zhiyue.

“It seems to be the sound of Pomo practicing divination.”

“Pomo? Yet another eccentric! But why would anybody be practicing divination out here in such a dark and deserted place?” says Zhiyue.

“Pomo’s not only good at divination; she’s also a skilled astrologer. This is the best kind of weather for observing the stars. She

recently said that she's currently observing a group of unusual stars. It must be her; let's go! I'll take you to meet her," explains Satana.

Taking Zhiyue by the hand, Satana leads them in the direction of the sound, all the while enthusiastically telling them all about Pomo and her extraordinary abilities. Passing through some flowering shrubs, they soon faintly make out in the distance a graceful, starlit figure facing the wind.

"Just as I guessed; it really is Pomo!" says Satana with glee.

As they look on from a distance, Pomo alternately fixes her gaze on the brilliant stars and then looks down with an air of intense concentration, rubbing her hands together all the while.

Off to one side of the meadow, the pellucid Milky Way miraculously flows down and grazes Pomo's head, while the pale new moon quietly hangs in the center of the innumerable glittering stars. Utterly enrapt in her task, Pomo pays no attention to the wind blowing the grass in all directions.

"Doesn't she look just like a celestial being!" says Satana. "Pomo likes places with positive spiritual energy; and she doesn't like places with lots of people. She says that any place bustling with people doesn't have good energy. I suppose this spot must have good energy; otherwise Pomo wouldn't come here to practice divination!"

The boundless starlight generously illuminates Pomo and all things between heaven and earth.

Seeing how impressed Satana is with Pomo, Zhiyue closely

observes this most unusual woman. Thinking that Zhiyue is equally impressed, Satana continues with even greater enthusiasm:

“Actually, Pomo is not so young, but she likes to make people think that she is. This spot has good energy and I’ve set it aside just for her so that she can continue to extract the essence of heaven and earth, of the sun and moon, and also nourish her spirit. This is why she has such a pure and radiant countenance.”

As they are chatting, seeming to have completed her work, Pomo nimbly puts away her divination stick, hangs it on her waist, and slowly walks away. Satana hastily calls out to her, but she continues walking without so much as turning her head. Only when Satana catches up with her does she finally turn around and say:

“It’s so late. What are you doing in such a lonely place?”

Although Pomo’s voice is full of concern, Satana pays no attention to it and excitedly introduces her to Kengeng and Zhiyue.

Pomo nods to the guests and says to Satana:

“The dew is not good for you; we’d better go back!”

Satana simply smiles at her guests and starts to go back along with Pomo, whereupon she asks:

“Have you made any new discoveries lately?”

Pomo remains silent.

Understanding Pomo’s reticent mood, Satana says to her:

“They’re my good friends, and they admire your work. There’s no need to be so secretive!”

At first Pomo was merely feeling awkward, but upon

hearing Satana ask about her recent discovery, her normally dignified countenance has been replaced by a vacant stare.

Utterly absorbed by everything Pomo has to say, Satana puts forth one question after another. For her part, Zhiyue finds all this talk of the stars to be mere fantasy, and finds it sad that they could be so deluded by it all.

When they arrive at a well-lit area, Pomo sighs and says to Satana:

“A place with too many people around makes it difficult to seek the truth. If I’m going to discover anything new, then I’d better go and find a more suitable place for observing the stars.”

Hearing this, Zhiyue spontaneously says:

“Pomo, real truth isn’t found through divination or astrology; it’s found right where people live. You’ve spent your entire life as a recluse, cut off from the rest of society, seeking truth in the night sky. Yet all this amounts to nothing more than seizing a rabbit and hoping that one day it will grow a pair of beautiful horns; but it will never happen!”

Hearing Zhiyue’s well-meant words, Pomo calmly replies:

“The world is so full of tumult and confusion; it only makes people bewildered. In such a situation, a person can’t even think of seeking truth.”

“When you live sincerely, earnestly attending to all you experience, then you find that everything in the world is imbued with truth,” Zhiyue kindly points out as she and Pomo stand face to face.

Aware that the discussion is going nowhere, just as Kengeng decides to try to change the subject, a lovely maiden comes up and politely says to Satana:

“Mistress, it’s almost time to take your medicine; Adapo wants you to go back and have a rest.”

Although Satana has been listening to all this with much interest, she well knows that Pomo’s belief in divination is utterly unshakable. Thus she leaps on the opportunity to cut the conversation short, and says to Pomo:

“If you have any news, don’t forget to come and tell us!”

Then she hurriedly takes Zhiyue by the hand and leads her inside.

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Led by the maiden, Satana, Zhiyue, and Kengeng pass through a long corridor illuminated by fragrant oil lamps and come to a pavilion encircled by night-blooming cereuses. Having never seen so many cereus flowers blooming at the same time, Satana hurries into the pavilion, which gives the impression of being out in the wild.

Thereupon she calls out for two cups of fragrant soup flavored with cereus flowers, lotus seeds, and wolfberries. Zhiyue is so impressed by the delicate flavor that she can’t help but praise it repeatedly, whereupon the childlike Satana says:

“This isn’t my recipe; it was the idea of Adapo, my chief herbalist.”

“Oh — this person must have an extensive understanding of herbs and plants to come up with such a delicacy!” compliments the normally reticent Kengeng, as he takes a close look at the red and white seeds in his cup.

Encouraged by her guest’s delight, Satana tells them all about Adapo.

Adapo has been studying herbal medicine and pharmacology all her life. In her search for medicinal materials, she makes arduous trips deep into the wilderness, at times even venturing into remote areas full of venomous snakes and beasts of prey. Gathered from every conceivable source, her medicinal ingredients are extremely varied. The black crust on the bottom of a pot in a poor person’s kitchen; wild yams from the mountains; shells from the seashore; fungi growing on rotting wood; cicada sloughs; moss growing in the corner of a house; water seeping out of a crag—to Adapo these are all precious medicinal substances. Although some of these ingredients might seem quite ordinary, for Adapo the key lies in refining them in such a way that they are transformed into powerful medicines.

First of all, Adapo is meticulous about the quality of the raw materials she uses and the complex refining procedures. Also, in different types of weather she refines different types of materials, and when mixing ingredients with different medicinal properties she is

especially careful about controlling the flame. For Adapo, producing medicine of the highest quality is no simple matter. The person performing the refinement process needs to prepare by fasting and taking a ritual bath, and must also have a reverential attitude towards the deities in charge of medicine; even the firewood used needs to be fragrant and pure.

In her efforts to produce the finest medicine, Adapo thinks nothing of the blazing sun or the chilling wind. Apart from treating Satana's back pain, she also hopes to one day invent a medicine which bestows eternal youth.

As a result of so many years of incessantly working with medicinal herbs, Adapo give's off the distinctive aroma of medicinal plants. When some people see the peculiar methods this energetic woman with a ruddy face uses to produce her medicines, they are afraid to take them. However, because her medicine is very effective, she is widely regarded as a highly competent pharmacologist and her services are frequently sought out. In fact, her skills are so highly regarded by the inhabitants of Silkworm Island, that every time she comes up with a new concoction, people come flocking to her to try it out.

Listening to Satana's glowing praise of Adapo while enjoying the fragrant soup flavored with cereus flowers, lotus seeds, and wolfberries, Zhiyue can't help but think:

"This Silkworm Island sure is a strange place! Satana is surrounded by such eccentric people."

Just then, Kengeng looks up at Zhiyue and flashes a knowing smile; without saying a word, they continue to drink the tasty medicinal soup. Soon a pot of wulong tea with Indian almonds arrives—also Adapo’s recipe—whereupon Satana excitedly tells them all about the medicinal qualities of Adapo’s many different concoctions. After patiently listening to Satana’s long description, Zhiyue can’t help but say:

“Every medicine has its benefits, but also its side effects. As I see it, you’d be better off without taking any medicine. Faith is the most important thing in life; medicine can’t solve every problem; the power of the mind is the best medicine available!”

As it gets later, the cereus flowers next to the pavilion open larger, and their fragrance gets stronger. Satana seems to understand Zhiyue’s point.

However, just then Adapo brings a wooden medicine case packed with a large number of pills of various colors, and Satana dutifully takes them just as instructed. Zhiyue holds her peace, knowing that people are set in their ways and that change takes time. Deciding that it’s best to drop the topic for now, she and Kengeng continue to enjoy the fragrant tea and the snow-white cereus flowers.

## 12. The Realm of the Five Aggregates *Birth of Autumn*

Birth of Autumn, the thirteenth solar term, marks the beginning of fall. In the Book of Zhou it is written, “On the first day of Birth of Autumn the cold wind begins to blow; during the last five days the white frost descends and the winter cicadas begin to buzz.” Birth of Autumn is also the beginning of the harvest season and is thus traditionally observed by making offerings to the ancestors and tasting the first rice of the harvest.

Birth of Autumn, life comes to fruition. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

Ever since he saw the radiant and enchanting Satana at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, day and night Enguang has felt as if he were tightly bound by innumerable cords of unbreakable silk.

Beset by such a surging stream of thought, he feels as though he has been cast adrift with no safe harbor in sight. Although Luotang Mountain is still its beautiful self, in his distraught state of mind, Enguang is unable to appreciate it.

Unable to bear the anguish any longer, Enguang hastily leaves Luotang Mountain for the second time and makes his way to the flourishing Silkworm Island to see Satana once again .....

Ever since Zhiyue and Kengeng’s first visit to Silkworm Island in search of the owner of the lotus petal, they have continually been

thinking about the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates they heard in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. They are also concerned that at any moment the Lord of the Five Aggregates is going to cast forth his inescapable dragnet.

Even though on their first visit they managed to use the one thousand eighty bodhi seeds to save the Native Youths and take them back to Kengeng's Farm, they know full well that the Lord of the Five Aggregates is a master of disguise and a supremely crafty fellow who uses not only the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates to ensnare his unsuspecting victims, but also has at his disposal a wide array of formidable magic devices.

After visiting Silkworm Island several times, they were startled to discover that everybody on the island has already been ensnared by the Kapila Incantation, yet they are oblivious to their plight. They now realize that if they don't soon discover the whereabouts of the Lord of the Five Aggregates and find a way to reverse his spell, then a great many people will end up enslaved in ignorance and tribulation for the rest of their lives.

In their estimation, the Lord of the Five Aggregates has taken on a human form and come to Silkworm Island. Yet, despite their best efforts, they still don't have even the slightest clue as to his whereabouts and what form he is in, making it all the more clear to them that the Lord of the Five Aggregates is indeed a force to be reckoned with and that they have their work cut out for them. In order to cover the most area in shortest amount of time, they decide to split

up, with Zhiyue remaining at the Mulberry Grove, and Kengeng finding a pretext to go to the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

As soon as Kengeng reaches the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, he sees his acquaintance Enguang nearby pacing back and forth with a vacant look on his face. Quickly understanding his troubled state of mind, he cordially invites the good-natured Enguang to join him for a walk.

Pleasantly surprised, Enguang follows Kengeng inside, but is soon disappointed to find out that Satana is not there, but rather at the Mulberry Grove entertaining her good friend Zhiyue.

Having come such a long way, his hopes are dashed in an instant.

Just then Asuluo, now in charge of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, recognizes that the simple and honest Enguang is Satana's former guest, and invites him to stay a while. Although he can't take his mind off Satana, he accepts, biding his time and hoping that Satana will soon appear.

While staying at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, Enguang is heartily entertained by Asuluo, and he gradually becomes familiar with Satana's commercial empire; he also becomes acquainted with those who have positions of privilege and power in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

In the process of establishing her commercial empire, Satana has recruited a sizeable number of highly talented people, who now remain at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen round the clock managing

all her business affairs. Among these, Yanbo, Yunxing, Chenwai, and Wulu have proven themselves to be the most talented, and over time have come to occupy key positions.

Ever since they met at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, Yanbo and Yunxing have been close friends.

Although they knew nothing about Satana when they first arrived, with lots of diligent and effective work over a long time, they came to gain her confidence and have been entrusted with lots of important and confidential policy-making work, during the course of which they were surprised to discover that Satana's wealth is far more than they had earlier guessed. At first, they were not particularly fond of luxury, but due to working in such a sumptuous environment and seeing how Satana has so much power and privilege, their tastes have slowly changed .....

While he's been staying at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, Enguang frequently goes to the observation deck on the roof to quietly enjoy the sunset while leaning on the long railing.

Today at dusk, having just finished her work, Yanbo is on her way downstairs to find Yunxing. When she enters the long corridor leading past the observation deck, Enguang happens to catch a glimpse of her curvaceous figure, and a strange yet familiar feeling goes rippling through his heart.

Although she was originally intending to meet Yunxing and discuss some business, when Yanbo sees Enguang she suddenly

remembers Asuluo telling her that recently two special guests are staying at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. After carefully sizing him up, she smilingly approaches Enguang and says:

“You must be Enguang! Recently Asuluo has mentioned you many times. I’m glad to finally meet you.”

Seeing such a beautiful young woman come up and greet him, the demure Enguang, now blushing, is tongue-tied.

Knowing that Asuluo is lavishing these two guests with special treatment, and inspired by this chance encounter, Yanbo says:

“I’m Yanbo; I’d like to introduce you to some of my friends! Then you might find this place more interesting.”

Even though the Palace of the Silkworm Queen is splendid and spacious, while staying there Enguang feels lonely and cut off from the natural world. But when he is unexpectedly approached in such a friendly manner by the lovely and charming Yanbo, an indescribable joy stirs up in his heart. Now beaming with a happy countenance, he readily follows Yanbo through the long corridor.

Yanbo introduces Enguang to Yunxing.

Of all the talented people working at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, the youthful Yunxing stands out for his eloquence, quick thinking, extensive knowledge, and charming wit. After finding out that Enguang is Asuluo’s special guest, he often gets together with him and Yanbo, with the result that Enguang comes to have a strong sense of connection with the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

The simple and honest Enguang gradually comes to trust

Yunxing, and while interacting with him over time he is imperceptibly influenced by what he sees and hears, with the result that an indescribable layer of haze slowly obscures his purity of heart. Only when he is with Kengeng does he regain his former clarity and brightness.

Aware of the change that has overcome Enguang, Kengeng tries his best to indirectly point out the error in his ways, but Enguang simply doesn't see the change in his character.

For the guileless Enguang is quite enchanted by Yanbo's beauty and Yunxing's novel views, and has come to regard them as his good friends, whose company he enjoys while waiting for Satana to return.

### 13. Form *End of Heat*

In the Calendar of the Triple Concordance it is written, “During End of Heat the heat is checked and becomes quiescent.” End of Heat, the fourteenth solar term, marks the end of the annual agricultural cycle of spring plowing, summer growth, and fall harvest. Once the harvest is brought in, the farmers conduct rituals for offering thanks to the agricultural gods and the ancestors.

End of Heat, peaceful and supple; a time for training ears and tongue.

Quietly walking through the fog so as to avoid drawing attention, Wulu comes to the Cocoon Room. Finding that the door is firmly locked, she quietly goes around the corner to the window covered with long blue shades and uses her hand to block the rays of sunlight as she peers inside.

The Cocoon Room is filled with silk threads of various colors covering every square inch.

The extraordinary arrangement is entirely the work of the meticulous Chenwai.

Wulu wonders how Chenwai managed to arrange so many silk threads in his small room to create such an aesthetically pleasing effect. Yet, for the imaginative Chenwai, this is nothing unusual.

Chenwai likes to observe things. In fact, he is constantly making detailed observations about everything he encounters in daily

life. Later on, when he gets a chance to be alone, he reflects back on all the details. The Cocoon Room is the result of this creative process.

In creating his ethereal works of art, Chenwai starts by meticulously designing a wide variety of arrangements. Afterwards he ties innumerable silk strings all over the room, from every conceivable angle and direction, in a freeform manner reminiscent of splash-ink painting. The finished product resembles an elegant cocoon.

As a final touch, in different corners of the room he places lamps which project a wide array of colors of various intensities, varied in accordance with the overall amount of light in the room.

The combination of the fine silk threads woven into an alluring web and the ingenious light effects is simultaneously attractive and unnerving. Chenwai regards this particularly vigorous arrangement as his masterpiece, and he enjoys nothing more than praising himself in its presence.

By contrast, Wulu is smart and pragmatic. Ever since she and Chenwai came to Silkworm Island together she has been careful to not let anyone discover that Chenwai is her sweetheart. In public she pretends to have nothing to do with Chenwai, and regularly speaks of him disparagingly. Yet, when no one is around, she stealthily goes to the Cocoon Room to find Chenwai.

After looking in through the window for a while, Wulu finally spots Chenwai lying on the bed with a sad and worried expression on his face for some reason, whereupon she grumbles to herself:

“He’s been thinking too much again and has gotten lost in delusion and pointless worry.”

Just as Wulu is about to call out to Chenwai, she hears someone coming and quickly hides behind a pillar.

She is happy to see that it’s Asuluo, who cheerfully enters the Cocoon Room. However, as soon as she hears the familiar and intimate way in which she calls to Chenwai, a dart of jealousy pierces her heart. Then she is bowled over by a surge of conflicting emotions.

Wulu waits for Asuluo to go in, and then forces herself to quickly leave, so that the plan she has been working on for so long won’t be ruined by a momentary lapse of reason.

#### 14. Feeling *White Dew*

With the arrival of the cold fall air, the morning dew begins to freeze into glittering, translucent drops. Hence the fifteenth solar term is known as White Dew. As the farmers' saying goes, "Rain on the first day of White Dew is bad for the crops," for it is believed that rain at this time causes vegetables to have a bitter taste. It's also believed that harvested grains moistened by this rain are easily bored through by insects.

White Dew, awe-inspiring and majestic; the visible power of proper worship.

Ever since discovering Asuluo's affection for Chenwai, whenever she is with Asuluo, Wulu never misses a chance to mock Chenwai and enumerate his faults.

This afternoon, accompanied by Yunxing, Enguang goes to find Asuluo to ask her when Satana will return. But much to their surprise, when they enter the reception hall they see Asuluo looking on helplessly as the young woman standing next to her heaps abuse on an aggrieved-looking young man.

When the young woman pauses for a moment, Asuluo jumps in and says in a conciliatory tone:

"Wulu, everyone makes mistakes; just try to forgive Chenwai this one time!"

Although she had begun to calm down somewhat, upon

hearing this, Wulu becomes even more agitated. With an acrid tone of voice she says to Asuluo and Chenwai:

“Actually, none of this has anything to do with me personally. It’s just that I can’t stand by and watch him be so careless when it brings so much harm to the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. Anyone who is receiving a salary should fully apply himself to his work, and not just muddle along!”

Looking rather debonair and refined in his silver silk scarf, Chenwai remains silent and just looks towards Asuluo as if pleading for help. However, the continual provocation is finally too much, and he says in a trembling voice:

“There’s no point in arguing about all this anymore. If you feel that I’m not diligent enough in my work, then we shouldn’t work together!”

For her part, Asuluo tries to both calm down Wulu and console Chenwai. Standing off to one side and having only the vaguest idea about what is going on, Enguang whispers to Yunxing:

“I think we’d better be going.”

As they make their way out of the reception hall, Yunxing gloatingly tells Enguang all about the many squabbles Wulu and Chenwai have had in the past. Hearing about all this conflict, a sad feeling comes upon Enguang.

Overcome with gloom, Enguang goes by himself to the guest room where Kengeng is staying and tells him that he’s fed up. But after listening to Kengeng’s wise and candid reassurances, he

gradually begins to feel better.

As a result, this becomes his habit during his stay at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

Each time he begins to feel hopeless and depressed, he goes to have a chat with Kengeng. For Enguang has found that Kengeng is so wise and lucid that all he has to do is visit him, and the haze hanging over him vanishes.

While getting to know Enguang, Kengeng has perceived in him a certain kindness, and he can't help but wonder if Enguang might just be the person Zhiyue is looking for. As a result, every time he sees Enguang in such a sorry state, he does his best to console him.

In his efforts to help improve Enguang's state of mind, Kengeng frequently talks to him about the wonders of nature, leading Enguang to start to reminisce about Luotang Mountain and think about returning. Yet, as soon as Kengeng is no longer by his side, his thoughts of Luotang Mountain are soon displaced by the beguiling image of Satana. As a result, Enguang passes the days torn between homesickness for Luotang Mountain and his infatuation with Satana.

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Ever loyal to Satana, in her constant struggle to mediate the ongoing conflict between Wulu and Chenwai, Asuluo has come to realize that even though Wulu always has the best interests of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen in mind, her exceeding arrogance

makes her blind to herself and harmful to others. Thus, seeing that Chenwai is always on the defensive, Asuluo does her best to shield him from her constant attacks.

Gradually and imperceptibly, Asuluo's concern and commiseration for the mild-mannered Chenwai has grown into something more.

As she becomes increasingly concerned with Chenwai's plight, she unconsciously begins to dress up.

Naturally aware of Asuluo's growing affection, with considerable skill and subtlety, Chenwai makes her mistakenly believe that he is secretly in love with her.

Ever since he woke up this morning, Chenwai has been listlessly lying in bed while heedlessly entertaining various thoughts: one moment it's Wulu's frown or smile; the next moment it's his complex feelings about Asuluo; then he fantasizes that one day he'll marry Satana.

Complacently observing the silk strings strewn about the room layer upon layer, Chenwai has the air of a great monarch inspecting his kingdom. Utterly lost in musing, he heedlessly follows his wild fantasies wherever they take him.

After some time, he gradually begins to feel intensely perplexed and confused, as though he is tightly bound in an invisible spider's web. As his vexations seize him ever more firmly, he tormentedly turns over and thinks:

“If not for that considerable wealth, Wulu wouldn't .....”

“Chenwai — What are you doing?”

As soon as he hears Asuluo sweetly calling from behind the door, Chenwai swiftly jumps out of bed, not knowing whether he is feeling happy or annoyed. Asuluo’s genuine affection for him notwithstanding, he still prefers Wulu. And even though he entertains the hope of someday marrying the gorgeous Satana, there is something about her he finds strangely fearsome.

In his confused state, Chenwai somehow manages to look in the mirror, fix his clothes, and put on a happy face before opening the door for Asuluo.

## 15. Perception *Autumn Equinox*

On the first day of Autumn Equinox, the sixteenth solar term, the day and night are of equal duration. After growing vigorously in the spring and summer, in the fall the plants begin to wither and the animals and insects prepare to hibernate. According to agricultural lore, if Autumn Equinox falls before the Mid-autumn Festival, then next year there will be a bumper harvest. Conversely, if Autumn Equinox falls after the Mid-Autumn Festival, this indicates that the harvest will be poor.

On the Autumn Equinox the sun rises due east, and sets due west. As the sun sets on this day it has the appearance of a golden drum hanging on the horizon. At this time sit down facing west and calm the mind while observing the sunset. Continue observing until the golden drum becomes clearly visible even when your eyes are closed. In this way one generates boundless merit.

Autumn Equinox, midpoint of fall, all things brought to fruition. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

“I can tell that you prefer her; otherwise you wouldn’t be so indifferent to me!”

“You’re being overly suspicious!”

“Overly suspicious? Anyone can see from the way she’s always sticking up for you that she’s madly in love with you. And the way you’re always asking others how she’s feeling makes it obvious

that you're in love with her too."

"Wulu! Is this what we want? What's the point of coming up with all these extravagant notions and using them to give me a hard time?"

"Giving you a hard time? Sooner or later, you're going to forget all about me!"

"After such a long time, how could you doubt my sincerity?" says Chenwai, finding Wulu harsh and unreasonable, and hoping to avoid the problem. But when he looks at her and sees those glittering tears running down her delicate cheeks, as charming as a lotus in early bloom, with anguish in his heart, he takes Wulu's hand and gently says:

"I could never forget you. Wulu, you must be patient! Once we gain ownership of the Palace of the Silkworm Queen we'll be together just like we were before—high-principled and free of artifice."

"But I can't stand it when you are so close to Asuluo," says Wulu, tears flowing freely as she thinks of how intimate they seem with one another.

"Asuluo could never replace you in my heart; you must believe me!"

Hiding in the dense hibiscus bushes while listening to their quarrel, Enguang is shocked by what he hears.

While out for an after-dinner walk, Enguang has inadvertently caught wind of this incredibly sinister plot. Falling into a panic, he

thinks:

“Asuluo has been in such high spirits lately all because Chenwai ..... Who would have thought that Wulu and Chenwai are ..... But how are they going to get Asuluo to fall into their trap? I can’t let their villainous scheme succeed! .....”

As a great wave comes welling up in his heart, Enguang’s first impulse is to immediately go to Asuluo and tell her what he’s heard. Yet, he is so near as he listens that he fears being discovered, so he remains hiding in the bushes, perfectly still, his slightly trembling body soaked in sweat.

Having discovered their plot, Enguang can’t help but to closely observe Wulu and Chenwai’s every move. Normally easy-going, Enguang suddenly becomes tense and anxious as he continually searches for a way to protect Asuluo and do everything he can to keep her away from Chenwai.

However, Enguang soon discovers that Asuluo’s faith in Chenwai is unshakable, so he decides to tell Kengeng about the plot and see if he can help.

With a heavy heart, as he follows the road circling the Palace of the Silkworm Queen on his way to the place where Kengeng is staying, up ahead he suddenly sees Wulu quickly walk across the road and disappear into the bushes.

Nervously following Wulu as she hurriedly winds her way through the bushes, a leaf unexpectedly falls on Enguang’s face,

causing him to stumble and fall on a flowering cluster of lilacs.

Vexedly rising to his feet while looking around to find out what fell on his face, he finds on the ground a sheet of letter paper pressed with delicate floral designs. Picking up the paper and noticing its delicate scent, he sees written on it in graceful letters:

“Morning Cloud, just go towards the horizon and there you will find me, a drop of Dew on a leaf, quietly waiting for you.”

Puzzled by the note, his heart pounding against his chest, Enguang hurriedly puts the letter in his pocket and speedily continues on his way to find Kengeng.

Because he already has thorough understanding of Asuluo and her staff, after hearing what Enguang has discovered, Kengeng merely tells him that only by maintaining clarity of mind and not getting personally involved will it be possible to clearly understand the situation; otherwise he’ll not only be unable to improve the situation, but will just end up getting embroiled in the turmoil himself.

Keeping Kengeng’s words firmly in mind, Enguang gradually learns how to see through all the intrigue in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen. Yet, with such sincerity of heart, he can’t help but worry as he sees the intricate plot being played out with such gusto. Spending the day observing the endless machinations of Yunxing, Yanbo, Chenwai, and Wulu, Enguang feels an intense sense of dismay; at the same time, his concern and fondness for Santana grows stronger. On the one hand, he hopes that Satana will soon return to the Palace of the Silkworm Queen; on the other, he hopes that she can remain aloof from all its

intrigue.

Enguang yearns to find a safe refuge.

Today, encouraged by Kengeng, Enguang finally returns to the peaceful Luotang Mountain. Yet, all the intrigue at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen insidiously takes hold of his heart, leaving him with a vague sense of unease.

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In a resplendent corner of the universe, there is the native place of the spirit.

Once upon a time, innumerable lamps of aspiration came bursting forth on the vast horizon. Carried on a celestial wind, they ended up in a distant corner of the universe, where they quietly wait for the right time to display their beautiful light.

Within their sacred splendor is ensconced the secret of the universe —

Do you hear it?

It's all around you,

It's that great river so fond of singing out,

All day long in praise of the mystery of life.

Now in the east, now in the west,

From the mountains to the plains,

From dusk to dawn,

In the first rays of day, he is there chanting, draped in golden light.

Say — Are you able to express what you really want to say?

Ah — I feel the cool wind caressing my entire body,  
I want to tell everybody how lovely the scenery is on this journey —



*Amrita* 

## *Chapter 4*



## Chapter 4

### 16. The Secret Door to the Buddhist Sanctuary *Cold Dew*

During Cold Dew, the seventeenth solar term, the increasingly cold temperature causes the moisture in the air to condense into dew. Cold Dew is a suitable time for planting wheat, and there are two related sayings: “Cold Dew is the time to plant early wheat,” and “From Cold Dew to Frost Descends leisurely plant wheat.” Once the rice has been harvested, instead of taking a rest, the ever-diligent farmers again take to the fields to plant cold-resistant barley and wheat.

Cold Dew, in praise of life; wherein inheres the capacity for deep concentration and silent observation.

Having renounced the throne and retreated to the wilderness, Ganlu removes his jeweled necklace, cuts off his hair and beard, and commences the arduous life of religious austerities.

Disregarding the cobweb spun between his eyebrows, paying no attention to his bodily fatigue, at times he remains deep in samadhi, at times he traverses the endless mountain paths.

With the sunrise and sunset as his boon companions, ever vigilant, urged on by the eternal, ever-present Dharma, he throws himself fully into the life of the spirit.

While still living in the royal palace, the indefatigable Ganlu

came to learn that an enlightened sage named Bianzhao had appeared in the world and was teaching others the way which leads to the realization of truth. Though unable to become his personal disciple, Ganlu has always deeply revered Bianzhao. And now that he has gone forth to live the life of a homeless contemplative, he hopes to one day meet Bianzhao and hear him teach the Dharma.

After a long period of diligent spiritual practice, Ganlu has finally quenched his thirst for truth by drinking deeply from the fragrant spring of his self-nature; he has found the mysterious key to transcending the world and turning confusion into clarity.

Amidst this mountain fastness, glowing with health and radiating vitality, Ganlu has created an extraordinary place of unfettered ease. As an expression of the pure light of his self-nature, he sits and walks in meditation accompanied by the sound of babbling brooks and the ever-changing natural surroundings.

Falling flowers, floating leaves, fickle skies, thunder and rain—for Ganlu everything in the universe has become a precious scripture which reveals his self-nature and the wisdom which throws off karmic burdens once and for all. Having clearly understood that his own heart and mind are the ultimate source of the entire universe with its innumerable worlds, Ganlu gradually comes to sense that he is coming ever closer to Bianzhao, who has gone beyond life and death. At times, he clearly perceives that Bianzhao is right by his side.

“Walk in solitude; always alone on the path to nirvana.” As the cool autumn wind whisks through the red maples covering the

mountains and valleys, treading on the fallen leaves, Ganlu steadily proceeds while admiring nature's mature visage.

In the silence of the wooded mountains, Ganlu faintly senses that he is on a path which Bianzhao has previously tread, with the same red maples, the same autumn wind .....

Having traversed so many brisk autumns, so many mountain passes, the sublime radiance of fortitude shines bright on Ganlu's youthful face, as the delicate moonlight silently enters his limpid heart.

Having just returned from some distant corner of the universe, Bianzhao enters his mountain hut surrounded by black bamboo and prepares to enter into a deep samadhi. No sooner does he take his seat, than waves of billowing light come flooding into his heart.

“Persistent Calyx Boy — ”

Hearing Bianzhao calling out to him, the Persistent Calyx Boy immediately stops making tea and goes to his master.

“Gather some pine branches and make a fire; then draw some water from the Spirit Spring and use it to make a pot of pearl-snow tea,” says Bianzhao, before closing his eyes and re-entering samadhi.

Persistent Calyx Boy says to himself:

“Now, I've heard Padmaprabha say that the pellucid Spirit Spring manifests in response to the Teacher's virtue and wisdom, and that normally he is very reluctant to use even a single drop. Yet, for some reason, today he wants to use its scarce water to make some tea.”

Tea kettle in hand, the Persistent Calyx Boy speculates as

to the reason, as he gradually disappears into the thickets of dancing black bamboo.

At that moment, still sitting in meditative repose, Bianzhao has taken the opportunity to appear on the top of the mountain above the path Ganlu is traversing.

“Ganlu — ”

Looking up and seeing the venerable elder—face as bright as the full moon, compassionate eyes like lotus flowers—standing alone in the windy firmament, Ganlu shudders, feeling as though an electric current is passing through his body.

“Wow! It’s the venerable Bianzhao!” Ganlu calls out in joyous surprise.

Finally meeting the King of Enlightenment after so many years, somehow managing to contain his excited joy, Ganlu respectfully bares his right shoulder, places his right knee on the ground, prostrates, and asks:

“Your disciple hopes to be reborn with an august appearance and dwell in a stately realm. How can I make this aspiration of mine come to fruition?”

“Ganlu, for all the buddhas of the past, present, and future, great compassion is the rain, and sentient beings are the plants. All accomplishments are the result of making a vow to benefit all sentient beings. Different vows result in different realms and bodily appearance; all our circumstances in life are the result of our past vows and practices.”

Suddenly a brilliant light streams out from between Bianzhao's eyebrows, and Ganlu enters into another time and place. Thereupon Ganlu no longer sees Bianzhao, but hears his voice amidst the white light saying:

"Ganlu! In the universe there are innumerable buddhas and Buddhist sanctuaries. I will open their secret doors for you, to provide you with some resources for establishing your own realm ....."

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"Kengeng, this place is really dark and deserted; let's turn back," says Zhiyue with a sense of foreboding, as the towering precipices grow taller.

Hearing Zhiyue's misgivings, the intrepid Kengeng gathers all his wits and carefully scans the surroundings, not saying a word.

One time Kengeng happened to hear that at a certain mysterious spot in the mountains there is a Spirit Spring, the water of which washes away physical obstacles and the limitations of time and space. Keen to find this legendary spring, Kengeng leads the way, accompanied by Zhiyue, Yushi, and Yangyu, all eager to uncover the secrets of the universe.

Several days earlier, they got lost and ended up in this strange, mountainous place, so barren and devoid of landmarks that they repeatedly lose their bearings. The sheer cliffs have the appearance of

impregnable fortresses and give off a palpable sense of doom.

Now exhausted by the increasingly labyrinthine path, they conclude that the Spirit Spring can't possibly be located in such a place and nervously wonder how they are ever going to find their way out. Only Kengeng remains calm and collected.

As the dark shroud of night begins to descend on their apprehensive steps, they grope about in the cold darkness. Suddenly, a blazing mass of fire appears on the ridge high above and starts heading straight for them. Seeing that Yangyu, scared out of his wits, has stumbled and fallen to the ground, Kengeng instinctively picks him up and starts running in the reverse direction.

“Hua-la — ” The ear-splitting sound of water rends the sky. Faintly detecting a piteous cry amidst the roar, Kengeng turns around and listens, whereupon Zhiyue urgently calls out:

“Kengeng! Hurry up! Yushi — Yushi — ”

Seeing that they are about to be engulfed by the mass of fire, Kengeng drags Yangyu down the path. But as he flees, shrill cries of every kind pierce his ears.

“Kengeng! Hurry up! Yushi is in there!” sobs Yangyu while pointing down towards the river.

Seeing Yushi bobbing up and down in the red water, Kengeng is startled.

“Hong — ” The fireball plunges into the river.

In the glow they catch a glimpse of a great many people bobbing up and down as they are dragged along by the current,

struggling to make it to shore, only to be swallowed up by the merciless waves and sent to the bottom of the river. Standing on the shore, listening to the piteous wails, they are at a loss as to what to do.

“Help! — Help — ” calls out Yushi from the middle of the river.

Seeing Yushi being carried away by the fierce current, Kengeng swiftly removes his belt and rushes forward.

“Yushi! Grab the belt!”

Spurred on by Kengeng’s call, Yushi manages to take hold of the rope, but is immediately seized upon by all the others desperately trying to get out of the river.

As Zhiyue and Yangyu look on in terror, a crimson wave comes welling up and sweeps away all the others clambering behind Yushi, whereupon Kengeng pulls Yushi onto the shore in one great heave.

However, as soon as Yushi is safely on shore, a mighty current of air comes sweeping down and ruthlessly swoops up all three of them.

Unable to resist the powerful grip of the tornado, they are swept into the air, battered by flying debris all the while. As they are being carried along, as if it has encountered some unseen obstruction, the tornado suddenly dissipates and breaks up, whereupon they fall to the ground.

“How nice of you to bring me something to eat; I’m famished!”

Still badly shaken, when Zhiyue opens her eyes she is confronted by the frightful sight of a gaunt woman with disheveled hair reaching for her hand and begging piteously. Seeing what’s happening, Kengeng rushes to her side.

“I won’t hurt you; I just want something to eat. Ever since I’ve come here I’ve been tormented by hunger and thirst.”

As the woman goes on and on about all the misery she has endured, their fear is replaced by pity. Suddenly remembering that she has brought some food for the journey, Zhiyue swiftly pulls a squashed steamed bun out of her pocket.

As soon as the woman sees the bun her eyes light up with greed, whereupon she snatches it and brings it to her mouth.

“Ah — ” No sooner does she open her mouth, than the bun turns into a ball of fire, causing the woman to cry out in pain and frustration.

Moved by pity, Yushi comes forward and tries to help, but all to no avail. The woman, seemingly out of her mind and unable to hear a word he says, just turns around and runs off at breakneck speed. In a moment of rashness, Yushi disregards the danger and rushes to catch up with her, whereupon the others follow suit.

They are soon startled by the sight of a great many others in a similarly piteous condition stretching out their arms and begging for food. Moved by their plight, Zhiyue pulls out all the food she

is carrying and gives it to them, but as soon as they bring it to their mouths, just as before, it becomes a ball of fire. Startled by the strange sight, Kengeng swiftly leads his companions towards a cave off to the right.

Inside the cave they find a verdant meadow—an altogether different world—whereupon their fear finally begins to subside. All of a sudden, they hear the thundering crash of a tremendous boulder falling at the entrance of the cave, trapping them inside. As they look around wondering what to do, a great number of strange-looking insects come crawling out of the tussocks and begin to give off a noxious smell.

Just as they realize that there is nowhere to flee to, a strange light flashes overhead, one ray after another, and then a gloomy darkness sets in. Before they even have a chance to respond, innumerable razor-sharp blades appear on the plants and trees, seemingly rising up to absorb energy from the rays of light. In an instant, as far as the eye can see, the glimmering blades are everywhere.

With each flash of light they catch a glimpse of innumerable people, naked and crying out in pain, some being sliced up on the knife-covered mountains, others being skewered on the sword-filled trees. As they look on in utter horror, piteous wails rise and fall all around.

“Ah — ” Panting in fear at the horrific sight, Yushi instinctively turns around, dashes to the mouth of the cave, and

desperately tries to find a way to remove the boulder blocking the exit.

Then Kengeng and Yangyu rush over and together they try to push the boulder out of the way, but they can't even budge it. Just as they are starting to shudder with anxiety, a strange, ferocious creature emitting green bursts of light comes flying over, causing Zhiyue to cover her face and scream. Turning around and seeing the frightful creature menacingly bearing down on them, Kengeng and Yushi take Zhiyue and Yangyu by the hand and rush towards the knife mountain and the sword forest.

Hearing the hurried footsteps, the people being chopped to pieces by the knives and swords call out for help. Frightened out of their wits by the bloodcurdling shrieks, they flee to a gulch. All they can think about is how to get out of there as fast as they can.

“Sha — sha — ” Suddenly a loud, harsh noise fills the gulch. Seeing nowhere to run to, they huddle together. Though buffeted by a fierce wind, the air seems to be getting thinner as they helplessly look around in terror.

Cringing, they desperately seek a way out of the deep gulch, but all they can see are the towering, craggy cliffs pressing in on them. Giddy with fright, they grit their teeth and get ready to struggle on .....

After learning from Bianzhao the secret of the Great Treasury of Light, Ganlu has departed from the remote hermitage deep in the mountains and now travels about on foot, ever adorned with the radiant glow of a sage.

Having already visited numerous different places, today the road he is following happens to pass through a strange mountainous region.

Arriving at the top of a mountain, a faint moaning sound suddenly enters his ears. He looks around to see where it's coming from, but doesn't find anything.

As he ponders as to the source of the sound, the cliff below collapses and wretched cries are heard all about. Peering down into the fissure, he sees a great mass of people dressed in rags and battered all over, endlessly undergoing every imaginable type of torture.

Seeing that they are reaping the consequences of their past actions, tears roll down his cheeks. Filled with pity and giving off a golden light, Ganlu makes a great vow:

“May the land I preside over in the future be without hell realms, hungry ghosts, and animals. Whenever any of the inhabitants are hungry, may there appear before them a jeweled bowl filled with all manner of delicious food; and once they have satisfied their hunger, may it disappear. In this realm of mine, may all beings be spontaneously provided with whatever clothing they should desire, without the slightest need for cutting, stitching, dying, and washing. May all the beings there be constantly benevolent. May they always be kind to one another and so sensitive to each other that no words are necessary. May they be free of enmity, jealousy, and ignorance. May they never hear an unkind word. May they realize that the body is an illusion. If I am unable to bring this vow to fruition, may I not attain

supreme, perfect enlightenment.

As the sound of Ganlu's voice reverberates throughout space, lights from all directions converge on one spot and form into a bright pearl having the force of a thunderbolt. Descending into the gloomy valley surrounded by iron walls, the pearl splits into millions of fragments of golden light which permeate right to the depths of hell, eradicating all suffering and fear.

## 17. The World of the Common Vow *Frost Descends*

During Frost Descends, the eighteenth solar term, the fall air becomes colder and the dew begins to freeze.

With the coming of the frost, the maple leaves turn red, which has given rise to the ancient custom of having an outing in late fall to enjoy the flaming foliage. In the *Zhenzhou zhuzhi ciyin* the Qing dynasty writer Li Tizhai states, “Certainly the frost has already fallen, for the monks are fetching water and boiling it for the people now going to the Yongqing Monastery on Bei Mountain to see the red leaves .....”

Frost Descends, the taste of prosperity; the wealth of the Dharma realm in great abundance.

Just when Yushi is thinking that the situation is hopeless, he opens his eyes and sees the innumerable rays of golden light, whereupon he anxiously struggles to his feet. All of a sudden a flaming mass of fire appears four or five meters away from him, causing him to break into a cold sweat as he looks about in desperation.

As a gentle breeze stirs the meadow and the glow of twilight lazily illuminates the mountain peaks, a harmonious fragrance pervades the air. Now that the frightful sights have disappeared, Yushi takes a deep breath, whereupon he sees Kengeng, Zhiyue, and Yangyu fast asleep on the ground. Feeling much relieved, he wearily lays down and closes his eyes.

After some time, the half-asleep Yushi is roused by the faint sound of footsteps, whereupon he sits up with a start.

“You’re finally awake!”

In the dim light he makes out a sagely-looking youth standing next to a fire, with a beaming smile on his face and a load of firewood on his shoulder.

“Who are you?” asks Yangyu in an apprehensive voice.

“I’m Ganlu. Yesterday I happened to be passing by and saw that you were in trouble, so I came to your rescue,” replies the youth in a genial voice while putting down his load and throwing a few pieces into the fire. “You must be hungry. Better have a few of these yams roasting in the fire.”

Hearing Ganlu’s kind words, their apprehension disappears, whereupon they finally feel the rumbling in their stomachs and gratefully draw near the fire. Ganlu proficiently draws the yams out of the glowing embers and passes them around.

While eating the tasty yams, unable to contain his curiosity, Yushi asks:

“Your attire is rather unusual; where are you from?”

“I’m an itinerant contemplative,” replies Ganlu matter-of-factly, as though unaware of the curiosity and doubt in Yushi’s voice.

“Why do you continually travel around?” asks Zhiyue.

Taking up a piece of firewood and tending the fire, Ganlu calmly says:

“It’s my spiritual practice. As I roam the world, I train my

mind and benefit others whenever I get the chance.”

“Then you must have already done a lot of roaming!” says Yangyu in admiration.

Seeing the wisdom in Ganlu’s face, Kengeng asks:

“So, where will you go next?”

Looking up at the stars and half-smiling, Ganlu leisurely replies:

“I have no fixed destination; I just roam at will, and stop when it seems like time to stop.”

Still eager to find the legendary Spirit Spring, they are all highly interested in Ganlu’s itinerant way of life. The next day, they set out following Ganlu.

As they proceed, in Ganlu’s spontaneity they discover a way of life full of wisdom and dignity.

After happily proceeding for some days, they arrive at a vast lotus pool at the foot of a mountain.

Seeing the red and white lotus flowers gracefully wavering in the wind, Yangyu is elated and excitedly runs over to the pool. But in his joy he fails to notice the slippery bank and falls into the pool. Now dazed and confused, he imagines that the lotus pool begins to rotate; then heaven and earth trade places, as if he was in some wonderful dream .....

After some time, he regains his senses and discovers that he is safe and sound, standing on a dark-green lotus leaf.

Wherever he looks, he sees only lotus flowers. In the sky he sees graceful clouds glimmering with the distinctive lines of lotus petals. Spellbound, Yangyu goes on admiring this marvelous lotus world until Kengeng and the others come to his side and rouse him from his reverie.

Seeing Yangyu standing unscathed on the small lotus leaf, Ganlu realizes that the lotus wind which came blowing in a short while ago must have transported them into some extraordinary place.

But before he has a chance to tell the others, the water suddenly begins to churn, whereupon the dark-green lotus leaves lift up Kengeng and the others. Then a light, cool breeze begins to rustle the lotus leaves, causing the dewdrops to roll off the leaves and into the water, making an exquisite sound as they strike the surface of the crystal-clear pool.

“How wonderful!” Suddenly a smiling youth dressed in pink gossamer emerges from a half-opened white lotus and waves at them.

For a moment they all just stare in disbelief. Then the youth lightly skips over the supple lotus leaves, approaches, and says in a friendly tone:

“This is the Lotus City in the Lotus Treasury World. Nobody comes here by accident. I’m called Padmaprabha!”

“But there aren’t any people here. What kind of city is this?” asks Yushi.

“We are in the outskirts of the city; people rarely come here,” explains Padmaprabha, jumping into a nearby red lotus. “Each of you

take a lotus seat and I'll take you to see the city!"

Pleasantly surprised, they each sit down on a lotus flower, whereupon the flowers fly up into the air. Following behind Padmaprabha, they soon leave the lovely lotus pool behind and gradually pick up speed until they are moving so fast that they can't see anything; all they can hear is the wind swishing past.

After some time, the sound of the wind ceases, whereupon they see a glittering golden light and discover that they are floating on the surface of a lake covered with golden lotus flowers.

"Hurry over to the shore!" calls out Padmaprabha with a smile, now wearing a different set of clothes.

As Padmaprabha takes them around the city, they are surprised to discover that all the inhabitants of the Lotus City have a most wonderful and majestic appearance as they go about their spiritual cultivation, some sitting in meditation under the trees, others practicing walking meditation next to the water. What's more, none appear to be the least bit annoyed by the visitors' curious stares.

All about, they see pavilions embellished with the seven jewels. Some are situated amidst the foliage and streams, some are floating in the sky and taking on various charming forms in accordance with the viewer's wish. Even more amazing are the trees, the leaves of which radiate seven different colors and make an exquisite musical tone when shaken by the wind.

Seeing so many marvelous sights, Zhiyue can't help but ask:

"This is such a magnificent place, but why aren't there any

women?”

Seeing Zhiyue’s bewildered expression, Padmaprabha simply continues to show them around, taking them alongside a meandering stream sprinkled with fallen flowers, until they reach a bright spot next to a lotus pond. Nimble bending down from the waist, Padmaprabha picks a young lotus the size of his palm, hands it to Zhiyue, and says:

“The reason this city is so pure and beautiful is that it was established completely in accordance with the vow of its founder. There exist a great diversity of life forms, but you are only accustomed to those which exist in your own world. That’s why you give so much importance to gender!”

Just then, Ganlu imagines the tired face of a loving mother and recalls the terrible suffering he witnessed in hell when he first met Yushi and the others. Then he looks at the lotuses in the pond, different in size, yet all brimming over with the same life energy, whereupon a sense of unbounded hope rises up in his heart. He wishes that one day he too will establish a realm like this, and that it will be even more stately and sublime.

In the fragrant Lotus City, Ganlu wholeheartedly visualizes an even more sublime and exalted condition of life. Seeing Bianzhao’s compassionate smile in the blooming lotus flowers, he determinedly visualizes the marvels and beauty of that future world.

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Under the bright and beautiful sky in the third lunar month, plentiful rains fill out the gaunt brooks and streams garrulously making their way down to the wide-open plains; all living things begin to sprout. With steps relaxed and joyful, Kengeng and his companions admire the charming scenery as they walk along pathways lined with fragrant grass and wildflowers wavering in the spring wind.

Ever since they parted ways with Ganlu, they have been continuing their search for the Spirit Spring, tirelessly observing the natural world for clues. Over the course of several months, they have traced the source of quite a few promisingly beautiful streams, but all to no avail. Therefore, when they first see this tiny stream, they don't give it a second look. But when they discover that it is home to a good number of beautiful fish they decide to take a look upstream.

They soon discover that, despite its modest flow, the stream passes through an exceedingly rugged section of the mountains, making their progress slow and difficult.

"If not for these rare sunflowers along the way, I'd have no mind to continue tracing this stream!" says Yushi, as if trying to bolster his flagging enthusiasm.

"Hurry up, or we'll never make it!" Suddenly, a voice comes from out of the nearby foliage. Soon they catch sight of a group of people rushing about in disarray, frantically collecting the dewdrops from the sunflowers. It's now well past noon, and as the strength of the sun slowly wanes, the sunflowers begin to languidly bend towards the ground.

“Why are you collecting the dew from the sunflowers?” asks Zhiyue as she approaches one of the lovely maidens.

Briefly lifting her head and glancing at Zhiyue, the maiden quickly returns her attention to the drop of dew hanging onto the side of the sunflower, patiently waiting for it to drop into her transparent bottle, before replying in a friendly voice:

“These sunflowers bloom in the morning and close at night. They may be very beautiful, but they only live for a few hours; they are quite ephemeral, just like our lives. However, by drinking the dew which clings to these sunflowers we can live a bit longer. That’s why we come out here and collect this dew.”

“Do you mean that your lives are very short?” asks Zhiyue in a puzzled voice.

“That’s right. Our lives are as ephemeral as the morning dew,” the maiden replies in a soft voice, having noticed Zhiyue’s genial countenance and feeling a natural liking for her. Yet, her lovely eyes betray a touch of sadness. Having also noticed that Zhiyue and her companions are somehow quite different from her own people, she curiously asks, “Who are you? And what are you doing in this remote place?”

“I’m Zhiyue, and these are my companions: Kengeng, Yushi, and Yangyu. For some years now we’ve been going around together, searching far and wide in search of the Spirit Spring. That’s why we came here,” explains Zhiyue in a kindly tone.

“You’ve spent years looking for the Spirit Spring? Then I take

it that your lifespans must be much longer than ours .....

Before the maiden can finish, from the distance an older man calls out to her:

“Yanbo, the sun is about to go down; we need to get back!”

“I just wish that my people could only live as long as you do. Then we wouldn’t have to continually worry that Death is about to take us away,” says the maiden before waving goodbye and disappearing into the forest.

Deeply moved by the strange ring of admiration and gloom in the maiden’s voice, without a moment of deliberation, they head in the direction where she disappeared, intent on finding out who these people are.

After following the meager stream bordered by clumps of grass for a day and a night, they climb up a steep slope and catch sight of a grassy valley with some huts made of sugar cane leaves. If not for the smoke wafting up from the huts, they surely would have assumed that the valley is completely deserted.

“Zhiyue, how did you get here?” asks Yanbo, wondering how they could have arrived there so suddenly, as if carried in by the wind.

Noticing that today Yanbo appears much older than the day before, Zhiyue takes a close look at her face and carefully asks:

“Are you really Yanbo?”

“Zhiyue, have you noticed that my appearance has changed?” Yanbo asks in reply.

Wishing to avoid an unpleasant topic, Zhiyue promptly changes the subject:

“Is this where you live?”

With childlike courage, Yanbo sweeps away the gloom, and happily says:

“That’s right! Our ancestors have lived here for many generations, but you might be our very first guests!”

Thereupon, Yanbo smilingly shows her guests around the rustic, slightly dilapidated village. However, as they go about, Zhiyue notices that Yanbo’s lovely face is looking older by the minute.

“Yanbo, when we first met the day before yesterday, weren’t you collecting dew from the sunflowers?”

As though Zhiyue’s words have touched a tender spot, Yanbo looks at Zhiyue for a long while before picking up a fallen flower and saying:

“Our people have always had a very short life span. Although drinking sunflower dew does make us live longer, it only extends the life span by a few days, so it’s not really much of a solution. Anyway, I’ve already given the sunflower dew I collected the other day to my dear father.”

“Yanbo, come with us when we leave this place; perhaps you can avoid the impending grip of Death!”

“Thank you, Yushi. But it’s not that easy; and it’s already too late .....” says Yanbo as tears of gratitude well up in her eyes.

In the lovely glow of twilight, the old village seems to have a

great many sad tales to tell.

Suddenly the sound of angry words are heard again and again in the village, followed by a tumultuous scene of men and women of all ages jostling one another and shouting out foul words of abuse. Some are fiercely vigorous, others rather feeble, but it seems that they are all completely focused on getting hold of some unseen treasure. Faced with the pitiful sight of her people abusing one another in such a manner, tears run down Yanbo's pale cheeks.

"They are vying for a share of the life-extending sunflower dew. It's always been like this amongst my clan. If I had a choice about my next life, I'd choose to be reborn somewhere else ....." says Yanbo in faint voice as tears roll down her face. As if choking on her words, she pauses for a long while. "I know that life can be pleasant and meaningful, but it seems that it's not my fate. Zhiyue, can you tell me how to be happy, just like you and your friends?"

Although they have just met, Zhiyue and Yanbo seem as though they are old friends. Aware of Yanbo's imminent demise, wishing that she could give her some of her own remaining years, Zhiyue suddenly thinks of Ganlu.

"Maybe Ganlu can help! If he were here he would surely be able to give Yanbo the guidance she requires at the time of death!" says Kengeng, as though giving expression to Zhiyue's thoughts.

Sitting in meditation in the wilderness, Ganlu perceives that his erstwhile companions are earnestly beseeching him.

Using his power of telepathy, he sees Kengeng and the others

mournfully gathered around Yanbo as she grows increasingly feeble, as well as the villagers selfishly scrambling for the life-extending dew. Moved by compassion for the helpless Yanbo, Ganlu informs her of the universal laws of suffering, emptiness, and impermanence, as well as the realm he has vowed to establish.

Hearing Ganlu's voice coming to her as if out of thin air, Yanbo gains hope, whereupon she experiences an indescribable sense of peace. As she contemplates that beautiful realm, a serene and contented look comes over her. Then she looks at Zhiyue and says that she has faith that one day she will be reborn in Ganlu's realm, and that at that time they will meet again; for although they must now part ways, the separation is only temporary.

## 18. Amṛta *Birth of Winter*

During Birth of Winter, the nineteenth solar term, most living beings reduce their activity and prepare to hibernate. This is also the traditional time for paying homage to the Earth God, as well as using salt to preserve vegetables for use during the winter.

Birth of Winter, solemn sky, all life in remission. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

With their youthful detachment from worldly affairs, Kengeng and his companions regard their search for the Spirit Spring as a sacred quest. Yet, even in pristine nature there lurks the taste of the world. As a result, in the course of their search they can't help but deeply contemplate the nature of life and the universe.

Although they continue to hold fast to their dream, when it comes to the unsatisfactory world, they have become even more circumspect.

At high noon the small town is bustling with life—people shuttling back and forth, and every type of ware on display. Weary from their long journey in the remote wilderness, Kengeng and his companions find the town rather interesting and decide to stay and rest for a few days.

“Beat it!” an angry voice shouts out to the two alms mendicants being hustled out of the crowd. Visibly startled, they

approach a nearby fruit stand.

“Hurry up and leave; if people catch sight of this it’ll ruin my business,” says the vendor in a low voice as he stealthily fills a small bag with fruit and gives it to them.

Looking quite out of place in the bustling market, as the pair of down-and-out mendicants continue their alms round they are either rudely abused or avoided altogether.

Their presence seems to cast a gloomy pall over the lively market.

“They look like alms mendicants. But why is everyone treating them so badly?” asks Yushi.

Ever since meeting Ganlu they have been favorably disposed to monks, but haven’t actually encountered any until now. Thus they eagerly approach the wan and sallow pair, hoping to find out who they are and what’s going on. However, neither of them responds to any of their questions; instead, they just silently continue their alms round.

Led on by their curiosity, they follow the taciturn mendicants past a winding plot of silver grass and arrive at a simple grass hut in a lonely place. Upon arrival, the taller of the two suddenly turns around and says:

“You must be outsiders! Hurry up and go away; anybody who comes near us is in for bad luck!”

Seeing their downcast and dejected countenance, Zhiyue tells them all about Ganlu and their time together. Thereupon, as though a heavy haze has lifted from their hearts, a smile comes to their faces

and they invite Kengeng and the others into their grass hut.

“Why were the townspeople so unwelcoming to you?” asks Kengeng.

“The teachings of the Buddha have never come here, so alms mendicants are looked upon as inauspicious .....” despondently explains the other, younger monk as he arranges some dry grass on the floor and invites the guests to sit down.

“Where have you come from? How long have you been here?” asks Yushi concernedly, as he looks around the ramshackle hut.

“Ever since we left the king over ten years ago, we’ve been wandering around; we’ve been here about six months!” dejectedly replies the taller monk.

As night silently approaches, Kengeng and his companions listen with rapt attention to the monks as they tell their story .....

The rain which began at dusk continues into the night, accompanied by a clammy wind howling in the darkness. Paying no attention to the primitive conditions, Kengeng and his companions pass the entire night huddled together and conversing with the two monks as if they were old friends meeting after a long while.

During their brief time with Ganlu they naturally asked him a good many questions. Yet his inscrutable ease and dignified bearing left them feeling that there is so much that is beyond words. Afterwards, witnessing Yanbo’s death made them feel strangely puzzled about life. Thus they feel a natural sense of affinity with these

two monks who are grappling with the same questions.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, as they freely tell Kengeng and his companions all about their experience as alms mendicants, there seems to be an undertone of fear and trepidation. They describe how their bad karma, far from discouraging them, has only made them more determined to practice repentance and discipline; yet they harbor no illusions that final liberation is just around the corner. However, the really strange thing about their story is that after all these years they've never met a single spiritual advisor.

As the rushing rain and whistling wind continue through the night, inside the grass hut the optimism and bright look in the eyes of Kengeng and his companions, and even Yangyu's happy snoring, puts the two monks at ease, and also encourages them to carry on in their practice.

“Whoever is the first to find the way to liberation, wherever he may be, he must surely share this news with the others.” The agreement Ganlu made with his dear friends upon parting ways still lingers in his mind.

Ever since receiving teachings from Bianzhao, Ganlu has been wandering far and wide, all the while striving to benefit others. At times he recalls his two friends who accompanied him in leaving home, cutting off hair and beard, and seeking the path to liberation; he hopes to meet up with them someday.

Today Ganlu's never-ending journey brings him to a bustling

market town; from the unfriendly look in the people's eyes, he can tell that the Buddha-dharma hasn't reached this place. As he makes his way through the tumultuous market he can tell from the devious whispering that the people here are filled with fear and animosity.

"Zhiyue, Kengeng — There's a fire, hurry up and get out!"

"Catch them! Don't let them get away!"

Seated beneath a dense cover of vines, Ganlu hears a great commotion coming from not far away, accompanied by a thick cloud of smoke billowing into the sky. Without the slightest hesitation, he rushes out in the direction of the smoke.

"We've done nothing wrong. Why do you want to seize us?"

"Ever since you arrived here, all sorts of strange things have been happening one after another. What's more, you seem to be in cahoots with those two ill-omened beggars ....."

Standing in the darkness, Ganlu recognizes Kengeng and his companions. From the heated exchange of words, he can tell that some kind of misunderstanding has taken place. Just as he is thinking of a way to get them out of their predicament, he sees several husky, angry-looking fellows hustling the two monks out of the bushes and towards the raging fire.

"Oh no! It's Yunxing and Chenwai!" says the stunned Ganlu.

Faced with such an unexpected turn of events, Kengeng, Zhiyue, and Yushi pray for a way out, at the same time trying to break free and come to the assistance of Yunxing and Chenwai. Suddenly, sinister laughs and pitiful wails fill the air.

Thereupon, as his thoughts wildly rush about, Ganlu spontaneously shouts out:

“Worldly people, why are you so suspicious about everything? I am unable to turn a blind eye and stand by with folded arms as you subject Yunxing and Chenwai to such abuse and engage in deeds which will bring such terrible consequences for yourselves. Life is indeed precious; but if sacrificing it would bring you insight into the true nature of reality, then the sacrifice would be worth it!”

Ganlu concentrates his mind and enters a state of deep concentration, whereupon a peaceful and happy world slowly begins to unfold from his lightly closed eyes.

“Amṛta, Amṛta, Amṛta .....”

“Wow! It’s the king — it’s the voice of the king — he’s come to save us! Yunxing, he hasn’t forgotten our pact; we’ve finally met the spiritual guide!” Chenwai calls out upon hearing that familiar voice. Shedding tears of jubilation, he gazes upon the cooling rain of Dharma falling like a precious ornament.

“King — King — ”

“Ganlu — Ganlu — ”

“Don’t forsake us again, oh King — ”

Rain, the refreshing rain of Dharma, washes away all the ill-will and malevolence from the mountain town. Ganlu’s unshakable vow is carried about in the night wind, all the way to the far end on the universe .....

## 19. The Blue Lotus *Lesser Snow*

During Lesser Snow, the twentieth solar term, the air is cold, but not yet at its coldest, and the heaviest snow is yet to fall. Now the earth is frozen solid, bringing the agricultural work to a close for the year. As the farmers' proverb goes, "During Lesser Snow, no more tilling of the land; during Greater Snow, no more sailing of boats. "The appearance of snow flurries during Lesser Snow is taken as a good sign, for it indicates that the locust eggs will perish in the cold, precluding a locust plague in the following year. Thus another proverb goes, "A snow-filled sky during Lesser Snow brings a bumper crop next year."

Lesser Snow, a time to observe the nature of the Dharma realm; all things emanate from the mind.

Through their brief and fortuitous re-encounter with Ganlu, the seeds of enlightenment in the hearts of Kengeng and his companions begin to spout. From Yunxing and Chenwai they have discovered that hope springs eternal in the human heart, and that a vow of compassion is a source of hope.

Full of gratitude for their good fortune, in a wild place overgrown with weeds, they say farewell to Yunxing and Chenwai, knowing that someday the weeds will give way to a multitude of grains and fruits for the benefit of man, just as Ganlu has benefited them.

In autumn the entire mountain is covered by reed catkins, the source of the rising sun, as well as its resting place. Following the wavering reed catkins, Kengeng and his companions slowly proceed.

Lightly brushed by the waves of reed catkins covering the mountain, when they cross the summit the graceful bearing of autumn gives way to snow squalls. Wrapped in the glistening snow, the earth takes on a heavenly appearance, where no distinction is made between purity and impurity.

Sliding on the snow-swept ground, Zhiyue picks up a handful of snow and happily declares:

“Wow! Such an utterly pure lapis lazuli world!”

“The water of the Spirit Spring must be like this snow: completely free of all impurities!” marvels Yushi.

Full of hope and admiration, as they explore the pristine snow land, the continuous snowfall covers over their tracks. For many days on end, they continue their trek through the vast land of ice and snow, at intervals stopping to rest.

“Look at that!” hollers Yushi, gazing out at the golden dots formed by the moonlight refracted in the icicles hanging from the side of a cliff.

“Hurry up — have a look — ” Yushi’s voice reverberates through the mountain valley.

“Wait! Listen — ” says Zhiyue, noticing that after two or three echoes the faint sound begins to break up and spread out.

“Hong-long — hong-long — ” Suddenly the enraged snow

fairies wake the ice and snow out of its deep slumber and send it flying up into the air and crashing down into the valley.

“Hurry up and get off the col!”

Alerted by Kengeng, they make a mad dash towards safety, as tons of ice and snow come tumbling down in waves above them. Too late to make good on their escape, they helplessly plummet down and down into a bottomless, snowy chasm.

In a dream Zhiyue sees herself standing on the summit of a tall mountain buffeted by a cold, howling wind. As if on a leisure trip, she stands on the verdant grass and observes the clouds. All of a sudden she sees a bright-red cherry blossom floating towards her from a distant snow-covered peak. Quite pleased by the sight, after watching it for some time, she moves towards the cherry blossom and stretches out her hand. But before she can touch it, the blossom suddenly turns into a young girl dressed in red. Amazed, Zhiyue asks:

“Who are you?”

Startled from their sleep by the loud voice, Kengeng and Yushi quickly scan the endless ranges of snowy mountains and then wake up Zhiyue.

“I thought we’d never get out alive!” says Yushi, his heart still pounding with fear.

Suddenly the bright and rapid sound of bells is heard in the distance. As the sound gets closer, they are overjoyed to see a sleigh rapidly approaching. Seeing that the sleigh is being driven by

a peasant, they begin to wave. Yet, the peasant pays no attention to them, and just speeds past. Thereupon Yushi trails after the sleigh and shouts out, but all to no avail. As the sleigh disappears in the distance, Zhiyue runs up to Yushi, pats him on the shoulder, and says:

“We can follow the tracks of the sleigh; perhaps we will find a village.”

Trudging along the boundless white landscape, they follow the parallel tracks cut deep into the snow, seemingly stretching out endlessly over the horizon.

Steadily going on and on, following the only marks in the vast expanse of snow, after a long time they finally notice that the sunlight isn't losing any of its brightness, whereupon they realize that they must be in the Land of the Perennial Sun.

“Perpetual sunlight! This is the amazing Land of the Perennial Sun,” they joyfully declare.

The warmth of the sun makes the cold snow seem friendly and inviting. Yet, the brightness of the sun stands in stark contrast to the gloomy and unfriendly character of the people who live here. For their attitude towards outsiders seems to be colder than the ice and snow covering everything, leaving Yushi and his companions feeling apprehensive.

Nonetheless, when they finally catch sight of the dwellings made of carved ice, their flying eaves like graceful water sleeves reaching out towards the sun, they can't help but feel that, despite their gruff manner, the people here must be quite friendly at heart.

After spending the entire day wandering around a mansion in the village made of jade-like crystal, they forget all about the icy stares of the people inspecting their every move. The resplendent sun seems to give them unlimited energy, leading them to go on exploring this wonderful place, as pure as if made of lapis lazuli.

“Wow! Such incredibly beautiful scenery!”

They come across a long and narrow strip of sloping fields surrounded by mountains, and full of various types of flowers and trees. Hanging on the lush leaves and branches are drop upon drop of frozen dew glistening in the sunlight, casting multiple colors upon the white flower blossoms to create a scene of exquisite beauty.

“Let’s pick a flower!” says Zhiyue, admiring the glistening white blossoms.

“No problem!” says Yushi, whereupon he begins to nimbly climb up a tree.

Thereupon Kengeng warns:

“Yushi! Don’t be reckless .....

As Kengeng speaks, the vigorous and valiant Yushi has already shinnied halfway up the stout trunk and soon disappears inside the mass of white flowers. After carefully looking around for some time, he finally sets his sights on a lovely and plump blossom hanging from the uppermost branch of the tree.

“Yushi! Come down from that tree! You are causing a scene!” shouts Zhiyue anxiously, as the indignant villagers begin to gather

around the tree.

“Don’t worry, I’ve almost got it!” replies Yushi somewhat nervously as he edges further out onto the limb. But when he finally gets hold of the twig holding the jade-like blossom, no matter how much he bends and twists it, he can’t break it off.

“Can’t get it — ”

Although he now hears the sound of hurried footsteps and angry voices, Yushi, unwilling to admit defeat, struggles on, as sweat forms on his face.

Then the shouting villagers lay hold of Yangyu.

“Yushi — ”

Seeing what’s happening, Yushi immediately jumps down from the tree in one swift leap. Seeing that he hasn’t picked any of the flowers, the villagers release Yangyu.

But just as everyone breathes a sigh of relief, the flower Yushi had been trying so hard to pick makes a sharp snapping sound and slowly falls through the thickly leaved branches and onto the ground. Just then, the sky darkens and a chilling wind blows in.

“Drats! It’s getting dark!” the villagers say in a tone of alarm.

As everybody looks on, the glittering flower gives off a faint glow, passes through the layers of leaves, and silently disappears into the snow.

Thereupon the villager’s ashen faces give off an angry glow.

“Young man! That was the flower that kept the sun from setting all year round. You’ve broken it off, and now you’re going to

have to pay for it!”

As the villagers indignant glares intensify, Yushi feels a chill run through his body, and Kengeng and Zhiyue run to his side.

The combined effect of the bitter cold and the villagers’ menacing stares leave them shuddering and terrified.

Suddenly Kengeng remembers Ganlu’s words:

“In the Great Treasury of Light is found the mantra ‘Amṛta,’ capable of warding off evil and bringing blessings. If you find yourself in a terrible predicament, all you have to do is recite it with utter sincerity and concentration, and you will be saved.”

“Amṛta, Amṛta, Amṛta . . . . .”

Kengeng’s powerful and earnest voice reverberates through the darkness. Recognizing that they have no other recourse for dealing with their predicament, Zhiyue and Yangyu whole-heartedly take up the chant and hope for a miracle.

“Amṛta, Amṛta, Amṛta . . . . .”

As the pure and harmonious chanting fills the air, glistening like the rising sun, the graceful image of Ganlu gradually appears next to the tree. Instantly, their gloom is replaced with joy, as they continue to chant with complete devotion.

From Ganlu’s hand a resplendent blue lotus floats up on the wind and lightly comes to rest on the broken twig, whereupon the tree begins to radiate a bright light.

However, having never witnessed such a miraculous feat, the villagers are still suspicious and fearful, and mistakenly believe that

the chanting and Ganlu's appearance are some kind of black magic. Thus they become even more enraged and decide to expel Yushi and his companions from the mountain valley.

Just then, still standing silently next to the tree, Ganlu emits from his pores innumerable blue lotuses one after another, which turn into glittering snowflakes filling the sky. Awed by the extraordinary sight, everybody just looks on dumbstruck. In the silence, the sunlight bathes the white earth even more brightly.

Permeated by the peaceful sound of the chanting, the land of year-round ice and snow begins to soften and thaw. Before long the marvelous blue lotus flowers begin to bloom, bringing broad smiles to the villagers' faces. As the glittering snowflakes disappear, so does their gloomy countenance.

## 20. Long-life Village *Greater Snow*

During Greater Snow, the twenty-first solar term, the temperature drops below zero and the ground is blanketed with snow. Admiring the snow is an ancient pastime, as indicated in the poem “Snow Window,” written by Ge Changgeng during the Song dynasty: “Bare wall, tiny blue flame, dark; red stove, night fire, deep; snowflakes outside window, white; a single sheet of bone-chilling cold.”

Greater Snow, a time for repose; playfully at ease in the supernatural powers.

In the depths of the universe, there are events and things which exceed the human imagination. In search of the Spirit Spring, the travelers rove far and wide, entering deeply into realms rarely visited by humans. As the seasons revolve in endless succession, the inexorable mark of time appears in their eyes.

“Hua-la-la — hua-la-la — ”

In a meadow surrounded by clusters of flowers—red, purple, and white—countless springs gush up from the depths of the earth. In the bright sunlight above the gurgling springs, a dreamlike rainbow shoots up. Accompanying the gurgling of the springs is the song of praise of the falling flowers; everywhere birds leisurely fly about, confidants of the earth.

Watered by the abundant spring water, life thrives in the grassland; the people prosper as if heavenly beings.

Full of hope, standing in the wide-open field ebullient with life, Kengeng and his companions closely examine each spring, as if impelled by the endless flow of the water to scour the meadow and find the sacred Spirit Spring.

They search for several days on end, but all to no avail. Finally, following a small path amongst the bright flowers, they are all greatly surprised to encounter a white-haired youth sitting next to a vigorous spring and leisurely playing with a small macaque. The uninhibited Yushi approaches and asks:

“Excuse me, what is this place? And why do you look so peculiar?”

Utterly unperturbed by Yushi’s abrupt manner, he replies in a voice as clear as a bell:

“Outsiders call this place Long-life Village. We locals all live very long, so there’s nothing peculiar about my appearance!”

“The number of types of living beings in the universe truly is vast!” Kengeng spontaneously declares.

Then Zhiyue approaches and politely asks:

“It’s said that somewhere in the world there exists a sacred spring known as the Spirit Spring. Have you seen it?”

Hearing her crystal-clear voice, the youth lifts his head, looks at Zhiyue, hands her a cluster of forget-me-nots, and smilingly says:

“My Girl, this entire place is the Spirit Spring; that’s why we enjoy such prosperity and longevity!”

Hearing his words, they find it difficult to believe that after

such a long and arduous search the Spirit Spring could actually be right in front of their eyes. Eager to put their doubts to rest, they decide to have a drink.

One by one they taste the sweet and clear water, whereupon an unobstructed joy pervades their entire bodies, seemingly the result of the concentrated energy of all the springs. As a result, even though they haven't yet tasted the water of the Spirit Spring per se, they are sure that it must be somewhere in this homeland of the springs.

In the brilliant early morning light, just as before, they briskly go about full of hope, tasting each spring they come to.

In the afternoon, they come upon a group of springs in a grove of verdant trees and taste the grass-scented water. Then Zhiyue discovers a moist rock spread with a large number of small fruits dripping with red juice. Yangyu curiously dabs a finger into the juice; but as soon as he tastes it he loses his balance, stumbles, and falls to the ground. Just as the others frantically try to rouse him, they notice that their breathing is becoming increasingly labored. Certain that the juice must also have oozed into the water, Kengeng urgently says to Yushi:

"We may have been poisoned! Take care of Yangyu while I go to look for help."

By a stroke of luck, Kengeng spots a young man skilled in traditional medicine. As soon as he is informed by Kengeng he goes into the forest, collects a wide variety of medicinal herbs, and pounds

them with a mortar and pestle to extract their juice. After placing the larger portion of the juice in Yangyu's mouth, he gives the remainder to Zhiyue, Kengeng, and Yushi, warning them:

"The Spirit Spring is just a myth. If it really existed, then people would have already found it, and they wouldn't have to endure so much suffering!"

As the young man sarcastically laughs, they fall into a swoon in which countless millions of people appear before their eyes and mockingly call out:

"The Spirit Spring is nothing but a fairy tale ..... only a moron would believe it really exists ....."

Thrown further into confusion by the disconcerting vision, they lose their balance and fall into the spring's swirling whirlpool.

The young man having disappeared, as they bob up and down in the water they are repeatedly sucked down to the bottom and then tossed back to the surface. Yushi stretches out his arm to take hold of Zhiyue, but the powerful whirlpool mercilessly flings her further away, beyond his reach. With tears of desperation filling his eyes, Yushi cries out in regret:

"I wish we'd never even heard of that Spirit Spring ....."

Becoming increasingly dizzy as he is rapidly spun around in the whirlpool, seeing that the others are as helplessly trapped as he is, and agonized by the thought of losing his bosom companions, Yushi musters up all his energy for a last ditch effort.

Looking all about, he spots a huge bubble dappled in surreal

shades of light and shadow. Just as he closes his weary eyes, he begins to hear a nursery rhyme:

“Spirit Spring, fragrant without flowers; Spirit Spring .....

Forcing open his heavy eyes, he dimly makes out the source of the singing: looking through the bubble, he sees a young lad with a jeweled bottle in his hand skipping along towards the base of a mist-shrouded waterfall, where he gingerly fills the bottle. Just as everything inside the huge bubble disappears, Yushi, utterly drained of energy, is unable to pay attention to anything or keep his eyes open any longer.

“Where is the Spirit Spring? Where is the Spirit Spring .....”?

shout out flickering human forms. Yushi wants to block his ears, forget about everything, and just have a good rest.

Suddenly Yushi spots the august Ganlu standing tall in the silvery, towering waterfall. Then he distinctly perceives an indescribable energy being emitted from Ganlu’s body and into the surging waterfall. Then the waterfall takes on the appearance of innumerable silver threads rising up with the force of a thunderbolt and permeating the vast Milky Way.

“With the infinite power of his vow, Ganlu has surely perceived that we are in trouble and has once again compassionately come to our rescue!” Yushi serenely tells himself, as his hope returns and he calmly closes his eyes.

✱

“The Spirit Spring is right next to you!”

With a voice as powerful as the roar of a lion, Ganlu rouses Yushi out of the vortex of bewilderment. Opening his eyes, he sees his companions safe and sound, standing next to him.

“You’ve finally woken up.”

Suddenly the lifelike image of the lad he saw through the bubble appears to Yushi. Unable to make sense of it all, he feebly asks:

“What is this place?”

“This is the Mount Sumeru!” says the lad, his smiling face beaming with vitality. “Oh, right! How did you all get here? I’ve heard the Master say that Mount Sumeru is located inside an endlessly transforming bank of clouds. Although some people have heard about it, very few actually reach it. Ever since I’ve been here, you are the first visitors I’ve met!”

Noting the lad’s friendliness and sincerity, Zhiyue briefly tells him how they got there. The lad, however, doesn’t seem to understand.

“Oh my! Master is waiting for some tea!” the lad suddenly shouts before hurriedly picking up the jeweled vase and departing on a moss-covered path bounded by flowers.

Kengeng and his companions follow the lad down the twisting path, and before long they clearly hear the sound of flowing water. Just as they are looking around to see where it’s coming from, they see the lad nimbly bend over and plunge into the center of a flower. Without the slightest hesitation, they follow suit.

“Wow!” is all they can say about the scene unfolding before

their delightfully surprised eyes.

Around a limpid, spring-fed pool silently illuminated by the rays of the setting sun, a mist sprays out from the fissures in the rocks, forming into droplets which fall on the flowers of all description bordering the pool. As the flowers open, the droplets roll off their petals and into the pool—"ding-dong — ding-dong"—making a distant echoing sound as if lightly striking a glass chime. Carefully skirting the pool, so as not to disturb its serenity, the lad slowly and solemnly fills his bottle by submerging it into the water.

"Kengeng! Are we dreaming? Even in that place with so many springs we didn't see such crystal-clear water!" says Yushi as he moves close and stretches out his hand to touch the water.

"Don't touch it! This is the Spirit Spring! Without the Master's permission, nobody is allowed to touch it," says the lad urgently.

"Spirit Spring? He says it's the Spirit Spring!" Yushi cries out.

"Can you take us to meet your master?" Kengeng asks the lad.

After hesitating for a long while, the lad rolls his eyes a few times and says:

"Okay! My Master may also be surprised that you are here on Mount Sumeru!"

At the same time overjoyed and apprehensive, they follow closely behind the lad as he goes past the flower path and through a large stand of black bamboo, finally arriving at a simple hut. In the soothing silence, an elder is sitting perfectly straight under an old bodhi tree; although his eyes are closed, he exudes an air of

incomparable kindness. The lad silently leads them past the bodhi tree, over to the tea stove made of red clay, and whispers:

“That’s my Master.”

Without saying a word, they help the lad start a fire and make some tea.

When the blue-tinted water is poured into the kettle made of white jade, its appearance becomes like transparent lapis lazuli. Once it becomes hot, it begins to give off a wonderful steam; gazing at it, they are transported into a reverie.

The steam slowly condenses into innumerable glittering stars which soar up and gradually fill the sky. Suddenly cold springs appear amongst the stars one after another and rapidly spray forth. In an instant, a soaring peak swiftly casts the stars down below its summit.

As the stars revolve around the peak, there appear multi-colored clouds, in between which appears the transparent image of Ganlu. Forthwith, Ganlu appears sitting on the magnificent peak, and the stars transform into innumerable world-seas, each watched over by Ganlu, who has now multiplied endlessly and is radiating a golden light.

Ganlu’s golden light illuminates the world-seas, generating stars of every description, each giving off a brilliant light. Then the majestic peak and the silvery worlds meld together to form the everlasting, endlessly diverse Buddha-worlds of the ten directions.

“Ganlu — Ganlu — pondering over the twenty-one billion Buddha-worlds, the goodness and depravity of gods and men, and

the grossness and sublimity of all realms, you have finally made your forty-eight great vows for benefitting all sentient beings. Before long you will attain buddhahood and establish you stately, brilliant, and eternal pure land.”

Suddenly a powerful voice is heard in the sky. Instantly the peak is enveloped by innumerable golden flower petals and gradually disappears. A mist rises in the sky .....

“Persistent Calyx Boy, is the tea ready?” calls out the vigorous voice.

“It’s almost ready, Master!” replies the lad, startling the visitors out of their reverie.

Taking the boiling water off the stove, the lad proficiently prepares the tea on a stone table. The tea’s elegant fragrance makes the visitors forget all their worries. As though suddenly awakened by the sound of a bell, they grasp the meaning of the Spirit Spring and recognize what it looks like.

Taking up the tea tray, the lad ceremoniously walks over to the lush bodhi tree. Coming out of his repose, the elder opens his pellucid eyes and kindly looks at the visitors. Before the lad has a chance to introduce them, the elder serenely extends his slender hand, smiles, and says:

“Persistent Calyx Boy, serve Ganlu some tea!”

Looking in the direction the elder is pointing towards, the visitors are overjoyed and amazed to see Ganlu amidst a soft, golden

light, slowly walking out of thicket of black bamboos to the right of the hut. They are even more amazed to see that wherever he touches the ground, the earth turns gold.

After circumambulating the elder three times, following the elder's gesture, Ganlu sits to one side, whereupon the lad deftly serves him some green tea; he takes it up and leisurely drinks it.

With Ganlu's appearance, the tea seems even more fragrant. Smelling the fragrance of the Spirit Spring and admiring Ganlu's vows, Kengeng, Zhiyue, Yushi, and Yangyu are naturally filled with adoration for the happy land described by Bianzhao.

*Amrita* 

# *Chapter 5*



## Chapter 5

### 21. Conditioning *Winter Solstice*

The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year; it's also the day on which the sun begins to become increasingly stronger. Since ancient times in China, Winter Solstice, the twenty-second solar term, has been observed in various ways. For officials the Winter Solstice was the day for performing a ritual sacrifice to heaven and earth; for the peasantry it was also observed in various ways, such as the eating of tangyuan, dumplings made of glutinous rice and placed in soup, a custom which is still followed today. The round shape of the tangyuan symbolizes longevity; a related tradition is to use the same glutinous rice to fashion figures of domestic animals, as a way of blessing one's livestock and praying for a bumper crop.

Winter Solstice, sun reborn, daylight grows. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

Passing the days in anxiety and inner conflict, Enguang becomes increasingly dejected; his worries weigh so heavily on his mind that they gradually obscure his ingenuous character. He frequently goes alone to the top of the mountain and dreamily looks out into the distance. Although he is unable to leave Luotang Mountain, his thoughts are dominated by his longing for Satana.

“Enguang — Enguang — ”

Today, as the melancholy Enguang again dreamily stares into the horizon, an urgent voice summons him back to reality. Asuluo calls out again:

“Enguang! Satana has invited you to the Mulberry Grove.”

“Satana!” calls out Enguang, his heart skipping a beat.

Feeling like he’s just been pummeled by a huge wave, the stupefied Enguang stares blankly for a moment, then a happy expression comes to his face.

In recent days Asuluo has been largely ignored by Chenwai, and in her consternation she has been remiss in attending to Enguang and Kengeng. After being reminded by Yunxing, Asuluo sent someone to Satana to report on the situation at the Palace of the Silkworm Queen.

As a result, Satana has invited Kengeng and Enguang to visit her at the Mulberry Grove. In recognition of their hard work, she has also invited Asuluo and her assistants to come for a vacation.

Upon finding out that he can soon meet Satana, Enguang is filled with excitement, hope, and fantasy. He forthwith prepares to leave Luotang Mountain and return to the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, where he has left his heart.

Having made all the necessary preparations over the course of two days, accompanied by her assistants, Asuluo happily sets out for the Mulberry Grove.

After smoothly speeding southwards through the ever-

changing island scenery, the train passes a vast plain, and then enters a dark and deep forest, darts around towering peaks, and past serene lakes ..... As each passenger in the chartered car enjoys the ride in his or her own way, Kengeng silently takes it all in.

Upon arrival at the Mulberry Grove on the other side of the island, Satana greets them with a hearty smile. Catching sight of Satana, Enguang is spellbound—her elegant yet simple attire, accompanied by her personal attendants, and standing amongst blooming flowers which look ordinary in comparison.

Finally in the presence of the object of his infatuation, Enguang feels as though he's a fairy walking on clouds, and can't help but fantasize endlessly .....

### **One: Affection**

Soon after rising early in the morning, everybody is excitedly busy, especially Yunxing and Yanbo, as they go in and out directing the others and preparing the skin diving gear.

In the afternoon, Enguang, Zhiyue, and Kengeng lounge in the pavilion bordered by flowers and enjoy the cool breeze. Though seemingly paying close attention as Zhiyue and Kengeng chat away, Enguang can't stop delightedly wondering when Satana is going to arrive.

Watching the people going in and out of Satana's residence, Enguang can see that she knows just where everybody fits in the

hierarchy on Silkworm Island, and also uses her natural charm to imperceptibly make everybody feel as though they are personally responsible for her happiness. Like an exalted queen on high, she is adored and doted on by a great many people.

“Zhiyue! The mistress told me to inform you that everything is ready, and that if you still need any special equipment you should let us know,” announces the maiden with a melodious voice, interrupting Enguang’s flight of fancy.

Zhiyue politely declines. Observing the maiden going away in the distance, Enguang is visibly uneasy. Standing up and looking at the last rays of sunlight reclining on the mountain peak, he says in a low voice:

“When will this sun finally set?”

“The sun’s not in a hurry; that’s how it is in the summer! Just relax; otherwise you’ll miss the beauty of the sunset,” says Kengeng, noticing Enguang’s agitation.

After spending the entire day busily making arrangements for Satana’s outing, Asuluo is greatly relieved as she walks through the twilight towards Satana’s white cottage. Seeing from a distance Enguang and the others in the pavilion admiring the sunset, she approaches and reminds them:

“The moonlight in the Mulberry Grove is exquisite! Better take an early rest; we set out before sunrise!”

The next day at the crack of dawn, urged on by Enguang,

Kengeng and Zhiyue arrive at the designated meeting point. After a long while, surrounded by her entourage headed by Asuluo, Satana finally appears. Her bright-red attire setting off her shining countenance, she seems to glow in the morning fog; all Enguang can do is stare in amazement.

Brought back to his senses by Asuluo's call to set out, Enguang blushes brightly. As luck would have it, in the commotion of setting out for the seacoast, nobody notices his embarrassment.

As though chasing the moonlight, Enguang notes the beguiling Satana's every step, every sweet word, every smile, and then cherishingly stores them away in his heart. Apart from Satana, he doesn't notice anything else during the entire journey.

When they arrive at the coast, the rising sun has already begun to paint the clouds with its colorful pallet. Donning their colorful attire, the white clouds gather on the distant horizon, like ribbons fluttering above the water.

The majestic sea silently sends forth its golden-red waves, as if harboring some secret; yet with each ripple of light its mysteries are revealed.

"This way — " says Ayou, the consummate pearl diver who knows the coastal waters like the back of her hand. With an air of authority, she leads the party past the strangely shaped reef-rocks and towards a wave-cut platform.

"From that flat rock you can see the most beautiful coral!" says Ayou, as a rush of anticipation runs through the party.

As the tide recedes and the wave-cut platform becomes increasingly visible, with much effort, they finally make their way on top.

Full of hollows, the platform is home to a large number of colorful hermit crabs. There are also a good many shrimps and small fish thrashing about in the shallow depressions, having failed to catch a ride out to sea on the retreating tide. In the wink of an eye, Ayou deftly plunges into the water. Encouraged by Ayou and eager to explore the underwater landscape, the others quickly follow suit.

Ever fixated on Satana, seeing her jump into the blue-green waves streaked with gold, Enguang quickly does the same.

Under the surface of the water, school upon school of colorful fish dart about, seemingly curious about these strange visitors. Intrigued by a school of particularly attractive fish, Enguang pursues them deep into the sea.

After some ten minutes in the azure-blue water world there appears a huge cluster of coral—jade green, fiery red, pinkish purple, deep yellow, snow white, dark black. The riotous profusion of color in the wavering light creates a magnificent, dreamlike scene, reminiscent of an underwater flower garden. For a moment, the bounty of color relieves Enguang of his loneliness. Slowing down, he gingerly shuttles about the dense, forked branches, savoring this pure and intriguing world of coral.

As an indistinct current lightly rocks the coral forest, Enguang catches a glimpse of a large school of multicolored fish briskly

shuttling through the coral. Under the impression that Satana is nearby, he abruptly turns and goes in the direction where the fish disappeared, but his abrupt movement seems to frighten the color out of the delicate coral.

Unaware that his impetuous and clumsy movements are harming the coral, he wantonly darts about, stirring up a rough current, repeatedly jarring the delicate coral branches and twigs.

Swimming on and on, he suddenly comes upon what seems to be an ocean trench. After closely observing for a few minutes the gorgeous waves of light reflected off the underwater landforms, he cautiously enters the splendid array of green, purple, orange, azure, and pink. Suddenly Enguang's heart begins to pound as if it were a rumbling volcano about to erupt

Finally, Enguang has spotted Satana.

Radiantly beautiful even in a wetsuit, Satana, accompanied by Zhiyue and Ayou closely admire a beautiful cluster of coral which looks like silver embroidery. The irresistibly alluring sight of her long, beautiful hair gently wavering in the water generates a sacrosanct feeling in Enguang's heart. Though secretly in love with Satana, fearing that making his presence known will bring the lovely scene to an end, Enguang suppresses his seething desire, hides behind a clump of coral, and stealthily observes from a distance.

Her slender, curvaceous figure accentuated by the wetsuit, Satana has the appearance of a celestial being gracefully floating about in the colorful waves of light. Unable to resist the alluring movements

of Satana's jade-like fingers, the brightly colored clusters of coral wave their dainty branches in a silent expression of admiration.

As she frolics around in the water, the ingenuous Satana has no idea that the lovelorn Enguang is hiding nearby, observing her every move.

Attracted by her radiant and joyful appearance, a school of curious and frisky fish suddenly gather around Satana. Like a happy child visiting a sea-dragon's palace, she spontaneously follows the colorful fish towards a sea trench giving off a blue light.

Deep in the sea, observing Satana happily swimming about, Enguang is filled with joy. Like the beautiful sunlight shining on the sea, Satana's radiant image illuminates Enguang's passionate heart.

## **Two: The Incident**

Following the school of fish, Satana disappears into a mysterious cave in the reef. Drawing near the cave, all Enguang can see is a dense network of coral branches. Carefully pushing them aside, he enters the cave.

After swimming around the dark and jagged cave for quite some time without catching sight of Satana, Enguang becomes increasingly nervous as he randomly swims about. Suddenly he emerges from the cave, whereupon he sees Yunxing and Yanbo swimming towards the other end of the reef. Still unable to find Satana, Enguang swims in their direction.

Following close behind Yunxing and Yanbo, Enguang enters a beautiful cave. But once inside, after scouring all around the cave he finds neither the other divers nor the exit. Just as Enguang is getting nervous, he spots a patch of light and swims towards it.

He soon discovers that he is swimming under a small reef island, and that the light is coming from a hole on top of the island. Curious, Enguang swims over to the bright hole and breaks through the surface of the water, whereupon he hears someone say:

“Now is our chance to present our demands to Satana. Otherwise, Wulu and the others will beat us to it!”

Recognizing Yanbo’s voice, Enguang instinctively clings to the reef rock.

“Alas! I’ve worked so hard for so long, and nothing’s come of it. Sometimes I wish I could just make her disappear.”

“Yunxing! Don’t lose your cool. It won’t be that easy.”

“Do you mean that things are going to remain just as they are now?” asks Yunxing impatiently.

“These things take time; we mustn’t act rashly.”

All along Enguang has considered Yunxing and Yanbo as good friends, but upon hearing their secret conversation his hair stands on end and he says to himself:

“Heavens! It turns out that Yunxing and Yanbo are also full of treachery! I have to find a way to foil their plot and prevent any harm from coming to Satana!”

Unable to bear listening any further to the nefarious

conversation taking place on top of the reef island, Enguang nimbly dives into the water and quickly swims out of the cave. Suddenly Enguang recalls the scented letter he found on the ground while following Wulu through the bushes — “Morning Cloud, just go towards the horizon and there you will find me, a drop of Dew on a leaf, quietly waiting for you.”

“It turns out that she’s got a foot in both camps .....” says Enguang to himself, as the meaning of the note finally becomes clear.

“I’d better hurry up and find Satana and put an end to their villainous schemes .....”

At once the underwater scenery loses its appeal and the water becomes obstinate and contrary. As Enguang becomes increasingly tired and feels as though he is cast adrift, it seems that his body is no longer under his control, and he begins to get nervous.

### **Three: Seeing Form**

After searching around for what seems like an eternity without finding Satana, all the tired and anxious Enguang can do is continue groping around the coral forest. Seeing the scattered sunlight on the coral, Enguang suddenly realizes that they might have gone ashore for a rest, whereupon he hopefully makes a bee-line towards the shore.

When he finally breaks through the surface of the water he hears the sound of hearty laughter. Recognizing Asuluo’s voice and assuming that Satana must be with her, he suddenly feels greatly

relieved. His limbs now light and limber, he happily swims towards the laughter.

“Chenwai! Don’t make so much noise; you’re scaring away the fish!”

From a distance Enguang sees Asuluo and Chenwai sporting in the water, but no trace of Satana, whereupon he just floats motionlessly in the water, anxiously looking ahead.

Then he hazily sees Chenwai whisper something in Asuluo’s ear, whereupon her white complexion turns red with blush. Knowing all about Chenwai’s duplicity and insincerity, Enguang feels disgusted and turns to leave. As soon as he plunges into the water he sees Wulu happily following a school of tropical fish swimming towards Asuluo and Chenwai, whereupon he conceals himself behind a mass of reef rock.

In her light green wetsuit, the lovely Wulu has the appearance of a graceful fish. Thoroughly absorbed in the wonderful underwater scenery, she has no idea that anybody else is in the vicinity. Seeing how guileless and carefree she seems at this moment, Enguang can’t help but think:

“How pure and ingenuous she appears, just like an innocent child!”

Suddenly, as though she has remembered something, Wulu keenly glances all around and then quickly swims towards the surface. Following close behind, when Enguang breaks through the surface of the water he discovers that Wulu has already caught sight

of Asuluo and Chenwai sitting together laughing, and that her face has turned stiff and dark, as if she has seen a terrible tempest. Seeing her disdainful and jealous expression, Enguang trembles with fear. Plucking up his courage, Enguang follows Wulu as she swims towards Asuluo and Chenwai.

“Enguang!” calls out Asuluo, her face turning red as she realizes that he has seen her and Chenwai in a compromising position.

“So, this is where you’ve been hiding out!”

Wulu’s sweet tone conceals a sharp arrow, shooting in from the side. Already startled by Enguang’s sudden appearance, the sight of Wulu swimming towards them with a crazed look on her face makes Asuluo so utterly disconcerted that she wants to escape by jumping into the water.

Nonetheless, the highly experienced Asuluo swiftly regains her composure, acts as if nothing is going on, and cordially calls out to Wulu:

“You’re really at home in the Water!”

“Not so bad,” Wulu says, casting a sour glance towards the stone-faced Chenwai. “Strange, where has Satana disappeared to?”

Hearing Wulu’s question, Asuluo suddenly realizes that she was so carried away in frolicking with Chenwai that she has forgotten all about Satana. Seeing the embarrassed expression on Asuluo’s face, Chenwai tries to smooth things over by saying:

“She must have gone off exploring with Zhiyue and Ayou.”

“Isn’t that rather dangerous? Asuluo, we’d better go and make

sure they are alright. Swimming over here, Satana was nowhere to be seen!” says Wulu in an affectedly worried tone.

Wishing to save Chenwai from further embarrassment, Asuluo smilingly says:

“Ayou is an expert diver, and she knows these waters like the back of her hand. Diving with her, Santana couldn’t be any safer.”

“I see what you mean. Well, let’s not waste this rare chance to see some more of the lovely underwater scenery!” says Wulu with a shrug, looking like she has just remembered something.

Seeing how, for the sake of spending time alone with Chenwai, Asuluo has nearly forgotten all about Satana, for whom she has always been like a guardian angel, Enguang is unable to remain silent any longer:

“Asuluo! Swimming over here, I saw everybody—Ayou, Zhiyue, Yunxing, Yanbo—but not Satana! We’d better go and find her, just to be safe.”

Despite Enguang’s urgent appeal, speaking in unison, Chenwai and Wulu object:

“This isn’t the first time Satana has gone diving; and besides, her diving gear is state-of-the-art. No doubt she will be fine.”

“Right! Apart from Ayou, Satana is probably the most capable diver on Silkworm Island!” assures Asuluo.

Just then, several brightly colored fish appear and begin to saunter about in the water next to the rock, whereupon Chenwai excitedly urges Asuluo to catch a few of them to take back and put in

a fish tank. Unable to resist Wulu and Chenwai's instigation, Asuluo says to Enguang:

“Enguang! Come with us! Don't worry; Satana will be fine.” Then Asuluo follows Wulu and Chenwai into the water and begins to pursue the rare fish.

Thereupon, Enguang feels utterly helpless and alone. He finally realizes how thoroughly Wulu and Chenwai have come to manipulate Asuluo, to the extent that she is no longer solicitous of Satana's safety and wellbeing.

In his disheartened and worried state, Enguang plunges into the water and goes in search of Satana.

After searching high and low, yet not finding a trace of Satana, a chill runs down his spine. Swimming deeper and deeper, he sees a magnificent coral reef in a deep trench. Taking a closer look, up ahead on the right he spots Satana amongst a large array of coral and starts swimming in her direction.

“It's Satana!” Seeing that Satana's hair is stuck in the reef, ignoring the risk of being cut by the sharp coral, he rapidly swims over to her and attempts to disentangle her long hair. Noticing that the air bubbles coming out of her regulator are rapidly decreasing, Enguang swiftly pulls out his knife and, with one swift motion, cuts off Satana's beautiful hair and carries her up towards the surface. Despite his terror, due to his great fondness for Satana, Enguang courageously rises to the occasion and saves her life.

Safely on shore, he rushes around to collect leaves, and uses

them to cover Satana and to light a blazing fire. After rocking back and forth, Satana closes her eyes, makes a faint smile, and falls asleep. After intently fixing his gaze on Satana for some time, Enguang is suddenly overcome by fatigue .....

#### **Four: Seeking**

Following the diving incident, Satana and Enguang become very close.

In recent days a gloomy mood has permeated the Palace of the Silkworm Queen, with Wulu, Chenwai, Yanbo, and Yunxing remaining as silent as winter cicadas. Asuluo has been constantly at Satana's bedside and hasn't had a moment of rest. All day long, Ayou, Shuye, Pomo, and Adapo hurry in and out with all manner of food and medicine.

When Satana finally regains her beaming countenance, everybody breathes a deep sigh of relief—except for Asuluo, who remains disconsolate. Constantly blaming herself for what's happened, Satana's magnanimity only makes Asuluo feel worse.

Satana insists that Asuluo take a rest, but when she goes out the door she feels as though she is falling to pieces. So as not to worry Satana, she musters up her energy and forces herself to walk back to her room. But as soon as she goes inside and closes the door, before she can make it to the bed, she crashes to the floor .....

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“Hurry up. The show is about to begin! “Five or six young boys dressed in hempen shorts and carrying small stools mirthfully make their way down the village street bounded by the swirling smoke of kitchen fires, noisily jostling one another all the way.

As the glow of the setting sun washes over the waving golden rice fields, the uproarious sound of gongs and drums puts the villagers in an animated mood. Those patrolling the fields or herding cattle hurry back home, where the womenfolk are busy preparing supper and getting the kids ready for a bath.

“The show is about to begin! Hurry up, or you won’t get a seat .....”

As the sky slowly darkens, the village becomes filled with leaping torches and broad smiles.

Erected in the largest space in the village for drying grains, the stage is soon glittering with lamplight. For this simple village tucked away in the remote mountains, the arrival of the theatrical company is a major event, and for the past several days that’s all everyone has been talking about.

As the plot thickens, so does the sound of the drums surging out from behind the stage. Completely enrapt in the tale of tragedy and joy, each round of heated applause draws performers and audience closer together in a common dream illuminated by the splendid torchlight.

“What a handsome guy, that youth dressed in white! Ah, such skill!” people excitedly call out, as the performance transports them into another world.

A lad no more than fourteen wearing a short-sleeved shirt sits perfectly still as he follows the show with great interest. Yet his interest is quite different—all evening he has been thinking about how to make friends with that red-cheeked youth dressed in white nimbly performing on stage.

When the show finally comes to an end, ushered out of the makeshift theater by the congenial evening breeze, somewhat grudgingly, the spectators make their way back home—that is, all except for the lad. His mind’s eye still filled with the image of the youth in white, after staring at the empty stage for a long time he suddenly decides to have a look backstage.

In the chaotic scene backstage, as the performers take off their costumes and put away their gear, nobody seems to notice the lad timidly sizing everyone up. Suddenly he catches sight of someone in white next to the tall rack of percussion instruments.

After excitedly zigzagging his way through the confused gauntlet of theatrical devices and nervously taking shelter next to a large drum, he finally discovers that the youth in white he is so eager to meet is actually a lovely young girl. As his startled eyes watch her long hair fall onto her shoulders, he is dumbstruck.

“Huh? Who are you?”

Thrown into a panic by the girl’s clear and melodious voice, the lad instinctively lifts a leg and starts to flee, but as soon as he turns around he knocks over a crate of stage props. As the crate crashes down, its load of ornamental hairpins scatters on the ground, leaving him stunned and blushing from ear to ear.

“Never mind; just pick them up,” says the girl as she kneels down and deftly puts the hairpins back in the case before looking up with a smile and asking, “Did you come to see the show?”

“Uh-huh.”

Apparently satisfied with the lad’s reply, without saying another word, she turns around and goes back to what she was doing.

As if spellbound, the lad watches the girl take off and carefully fold up the long white gown he admires so much. Mustering up his nerve, he blurts out:

“How long will you stay in our village?”

Looking up at the lad, she says in her bell-like voice:

“We’ve already been here for three days. First thing tomorrow morning we’re setting out for another place!”

Disappointed, the lad hastily asks:

“Will you come back?”

“It’s hard to say.”

After hesitating for a moment, the ingenuous lad says that he hopes they can be friends. Touched by his sincerity, the girl says:

“We can be friends forever!”

Naturally pleased with her response, he smilingly says:

“Really? Great! ..... Oh, right. What’s your name?”

“Asuluo. How about you?”

“I’m Enguang.”

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“Enguang, Enguang — ”

Roused awake by her own voice, Asuluo comes back to the present.

“Enguang? Is Enguang the person I’ve secretly adored ever since childhood?” Suddenly carried away by a chaotic train of thought, Asuluo manages to get up and go to the window. Watching the rosy clouds coursing through the sky, a powerful wave of ideas and emotions surges through her heart.

Suddenly recollecting the simple and upright expression in Enguang’s eyes, and then remembering how upon first meeting him she felt as though they had met before, Asuluo’s heart skips a beat.

Thereupon a wave of emotion which had been deeply buried in her memory comes surging up, imperceptibly attenuating her interest in Chenwai.

Though eager to find Enguang and confirm her intuitions, remembering how dedicated and solicitous he is towards Satana, she hesitates and thinks:

“Enguang really likes Satana .....

Reflecting on the incredible karmic connection which has brought together Enguang, Satana, and herself, the pure-hearted Asuluo can’t help but contemplate all the details.

In the early morning, as the breeze rustles the leaves of the mulberry trees, causing a sweet fragrance to come wafting out, the first rays of the sun begin to cast wavering, mottled shadows on the ground,

and the heavy-hearted Enguang begins to pass another lonely day.

A powerful tempest is approaching the lovely Silkworm Island, but it seems that Enguang is the only one who knows. Already ill at ease due to the constant plotting and intrigue going on around him, after the diving trip his trusted confidant Kengeng has departed together with Zhiyue. Although he was invited to leave with them, the love-sick Enguang, intent on helping Satana in whatever way he can, came up with an excuse for staying behind.

Enguang is unable to adapt to the complex interpersonal situation on Silkworm Island. Though aware of the sinister machinations of Yunxing, Yanbo, Wulu, and Chenwai, he feels helpless to intervene. Enguang sincerely wants to help Satana, but is at a loss as to how to do so.

Unable to come up with a sound strategy, Enguang worries that Satana's property—and even her life—is in jeopardy. He decides that the best he can do is try to warn Satana and Asuluo about the danger lurking on Silkworm Island.

Satana has Yunxing invite Enguang to the flower garden that evening to drink tea. Although arriving with a spark of hope, his unvoiced worries cast a pall over his heart.

Noticing that Enguang looks gloomy and is not really enjoying his rare visit to the flower garden filled with the strains of tasteful music, Asuluo goes up to him and says:

“Enguang! Don't fall prey to baseless fears; you'll miss out on a good time!”

Forcing a smile, Enguang goes off to one side and sits down on a stone seat.

Utterly oblivious to the treacherous plots threatening to engulf Silkworm Island, with her white silk dress setting off her pert short hair, Satana is the epitome of blissful ignorance. Seemingly not noticing Enguang's arrival, she continues to leisurely admire the starry sky infused with moonlight.

Gazing at the beautiful Satana from behind, all of the innumerable words stuffed away in Enguang's heart come welling up. Unable to resist the impulse to approach and tell her everything, a fierce battle rages in his heart.

Before he can do so, Yunxing and Yanbo, pretending to be serious, take up a simple stove and bamboo case, and fawningly say to Satana:

"Making tea under the moonlight; a more refined and tasteful pastime is not to be found!"

As Yunxing proficiently lights up a fire, the charming Yanbo takes Satana by the hand and together they open up the bamboo case. While admiring the exquisite tea set inside, Yanbo comments on all the procedures involved in brewing tea, as well as the carefree and leisurely attitude of the famous tea masters of old.

With childlike enthusiasm, one moment Satana takes up a fan and starts fanning the fire, and the next moment goes back to listening to Yanbo. Just as the evening wind becomes infused with the slight fragrance of tea, she notices Enguang sitting alone, off to one side.

“Huh? Enguang! When did you arrive? Why are you sitting over there by yourself? Come over and try some of the tea I’ve prepared!”

Satana’s melodious voice clears away the haze in Enguang’s heart. Going over to her, he obligingly samples Satana’s tea-making skill and talks about the tea plantations in his native place.

Just as his mood is taking a slight turn for the better, Enguang sees Wulu and Chenwai approaching with trays full of various snacks. Seeing the pair of plotters using feigned loyalty and devotion to conceal their sinister designs, a raging storm kicks up in his heart.

Late in the evening, just as the ground becomes visible in the moonlight, and a cold breeze soundlessly blows in, Asuluo’s fatigue becomes visible on her face. Noticing that she seems to be somewhat weary, Satana concernedly says:

“Asuluo, you’re tired; better go and have a rest!”

“I’m okay! But Yunxing, Yanbo, Wulu, and Chenwai all have a lot of important work to do tomorrow. Better let them call it a night first!” replies Asuluo, hoping to give Enguang an opportunity to be alone with Satana.

Nodding in agreement, Satana urges them to take an early rest.

Drenched in moonlight, as the flower garden begins to quiet down, the increasingly distinct song of the insects begins to trifle with the blooming flowers. Sighing with emotion as he observes the subtly beautiful scene, intent on feeling out the situation, Enguang plucks up his nerve and says to Satana:

“You know, if not for all the help she gets from Yunxing, Yanbo, Wulu, and Chenwai, Asuluo would have a terribly difficult time managing all the affairs on Silkworm Island!”

In response to Enguang’s praise, Satana happily tells him all about her five assistants.

Disinclined to spoil the tranquil mood by rashly revealing their devious machinations, Enguang continues to listen, gathering from Satana’s words that her naiveté and self-confidence make it impossible for her to understand what he wants to tell her.

Seeing that both Satana and Asuluo fully trust their assistants and are quite incapable of perceiving their nefarious designs, the image of the silkworms nibbling on the mulberry leaves appears to his mind’s eye.

“If things continue like this, there will surely come a day when Silkworm Island comes to ruin .....” murmurs Enguang.

Worried and hardly able to sleep, day by day Enguang becomes increasingly thin and pallid.

Today his old travel companions Zhiyue and Kengeng have returned to Silkworm Island, and Enguang is determined to tell them about the plots he has discovered.

On that rainy night, after divulging everything he has discovered to his two trusted and wise confidants, Enguang anxiously beseeches their help:

“Kengeng, hurry up and think of something; we can’t look on

indifferently while Satana falls into their trap!”

Outside the window, the sound of the rain pouring down seems to materialize Enguang’s tumultuous and anxious frame of mind.

Hearing Enguang divulge his momentous discovery, Kengeng and Zhiyue are not in the least surprised. Handing him a cup of delicately fragrant pearl-snow tea, Zhiyue says in a gentle and conciliatory voice:

“Enguang, don’t be impatient. These things can’t be solved overnight. What’s more, Satana and Asuluo have so much faith in Yunxing and the others that if you don’t handle things properly, you can easily make matters worse.”

Savoring the tea, Kengeng adds:

“These four people are already so overcome with ambition and greed that trying to restrain them or put them in their place will only exacerbate the situation. As I see it, the best way to deal with them is to just let their plots fall to pieces; only then will they have a chance to wake up to the folly of their ways.”

“But they are plotting to seize all of Satana’s property, and it’s not something that just began yesterday. As for their realizing the folly of their ways, that’s easier said than done!” Enguang exclaims.

“You’re right about their scheme to seize Satana’s property, and that this kind of wanton avarice isn’t easy to deal with. In my view, the only way to clear away the haze shrouding this island is to first find out where the Lord of the Five Aggregates is hiding.”

“The Lord of the Five Aggregates? Who is that?” Enguang asks in a frightened voice.

“Hou — hou — ” roars Kengeng’s Suanni. Then the Suanni lazily stretches, swaggers over to Kengeng, and licks Kengeng’s hand, whereupon he has a sudden flash of inspiration:

“Why don’t we ask Ranghe to help?”

His hope reignited by Kengeng’s excited words, Enguang urgently asks:

“Ranghe? Who is Ranghe?”

“We ourselves may not be able to immediately locate the Lord of the Five Aggregates, but we can ask the youth Ranghe for help!” says Zhiyue with a smile.

“The youth Ranghe? Just who is that? And where is he? What sort of special ability does he have?” asks Enguang anxiously.

Patting Enguang on the shoulder, Kengeng says:

“Ranghe is a person endowed with great wisdom and an impeccably pure heart. As for his whereabouts, he has no fixed abode.”

“If he has no fixed abode, then how will we find him?”

“Enguang, although he has no fixed abode, Ranghe always immediately responds to whoever sincerely calls upon him,” Zhiyue says assuringly.

“He immediately responds to whoever sincerely calls upon him?” asks Enguang.

“That’s right! All we have to do is sincerely and wholeheartedly beseech Ranghe, and no matter how far away he may

be, he will immediately come to our assistance. And as soon as he appears, whatever wicked thoughts anybody may be harboring will immediately vanish.”

“There’s no time to waste! In this downpour, nobody will disturb us. Let’s entreat Ranghe’s assistance right here,” Kengeng says to Zhiyue.

Thereupon Kengeng and Zhiyue sit in a solemn and serene fashion facing west, as Enguang stands to one side and looks on in wonderment. Then Kengeng fondly strokes the Suanni’s head and tells it in a stately yet intimate manner:

“Behave yourself; sit on one side and keep watch!”

Noticing Enguang’s puzzled expression, Zhiyue kindly says:

“Enguang, if you want to help Satana, then you’d better join us. All you have to do is wholeheartedly entreat Ranghe. If any doubts or extraneous thoughts arise in your mind, you have to immediately cut them off.”

Eager to help Satana, Enguang serenely sits down, calms his mind, one-pointedly thinks of Ranghe, and entreats his assistance.

## **Five: Implementation**

With a shallow dimple which appears when he smiles and a stately appearance as inviting as a pure-flowing spring in a mountain valley, people often think that the youth Ranghe has descended from the Milky Way. In his spacious garden full of white lotuses he keeps a

suanni with a yellow glow and a noble bearing.

In addition to his bright eyes, the white tuft of hair between Ranghe's naturally white eyebrows lends him an air of profound wisdom. Endowed with a soaring spirit and all the best qualities heaven has on offer, every day at sunrise he is bathed in a nimbus of golden light. His azure robe with long, slender sleeves nearly reaching his knees accentuates his extraordinarily dignified appearance.

Every day at sunset, his Suanni serenely sits at the top of a cliff overlooking the vast sea and observes the magnificent display of colorful light. This is also the time when Ranghe goes to the Wanhong Pavilion surrounded by white lotus flowers, places his hands in the samadhi mudra, and contemplates Truth. Just when the red sun falls into line with the golden drum inside the pavilion, the thundering sound of drums is heard on the horizon, whereupon the Suanni's eyes brighten and his ears stand up. As the captivated Suanni sits perfectly still and listens, in the pavilion Ranghe begins to chant, "Amṛta — Amṛta —" Riding on the evening tide, wave by wave the deep and powerful sound is carried towards the boundless horizon, up until the moment the sun disappears into the sea.

The pure-spirited Ranghe resembles the morning dew which forms on the twigs every day. With his serene and august countenance, all who see him are infused with vitality and joy. Though at times he appears in the world of men, he finds nothing there worth getting attached to. Just like the fresh white lotus he always has in his hand, Ranghe remains eternally aloof from the muck and mire of the world.

In the course of his endless wandering, today Ranghe arrives at a grassy meadow shrouded in fog. Suddenly perceiving that someone is earnestly beseeching him, he turns his attention to Silkworm Island.

Instantly he perceives the earnest and sincere entreaty of Zhiyue, Kengeng, and Enguang .....

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After several days, the drenching rains have finally stopped, and the brilliant rays of the setting sun once again grace Silkworm Island.

Returning to her room after a long and exhausting day at work, Yanbo finally has a chance to relax. Opening a cabinet, with exceptional caution she gingerly takes out a case made of black sandalwood and bordered with sea shells.

Holding the case, she turns around and plops down on the large, soft bed. When she slowly opens the case, a sparkling light comes pouring out; the priceless pearls and jewels of every description inside fill the small bedroom with a splendid radiance.

The attractive Yanbo has an inordinate desire to possess beautiful things. Having acquired quite a few jewels in her youth, she is fond of adorning herself with them as a way of gaining attention. She regards those in this black case as her most prized possessions. However, when she came to Silkworm Island she discovered that her jewels were nothing in comparison with those of Satana. Yet, because

Silkworm Island abounds in precious gems—jade, pearls, diamonds, to name a few—Satana doesn’t see them as anything special. Thus Satana regularly takes off the jewelry she is wearing and gives it away. Deeply impressed by Satana’s splendid jewelry and deeply immersed in the luxurious lifestyle of Silkworm Island, Yanbo has become frightfully greedy and envious. To her, Satana’s beauty is mainly due to all the gorgeous jewelry she wears.

Seeing Yanbo painstakingly trying on each piece of jewelry, Ranghe smilingly says:

“This girl has completely forgotten how naturally beautiful she is.”

Just then, a cluster of exquisite drops of water appears in the vast, chilly fog. While closely observing the drops, Ranghe extends his hand, but before they can alight on his palm, he blows them in the direction of Silkworm Island.

Suddenly feeling overcome with fatigue, before she has a chance to put away her beloved jewels, Yanbo falls into the dream realm prepared just for her by Ranghe .....

“Huh! What is this place?”

Yanbo’s heart thumps with excitement as she ogles the mountains of exquisitely crafted jewelry arrayed in front of her eyes. Diffident at first, she coyly picks up several precious necklaces and tries them on. However, emboldened by her discovery that nobody is watching, she soon begins picking up as many pieces of jewelry she

can lay her hands on.

Just as she reaches the point where she is sure to collapse if she takes up one more, there is a great noise. Then she watches with bulging eyes as not far off another mountain of jewels comes rising up out of the ground. Before she has a chance to rush over to get a closer look, yet another hoard of jewels comes rising up right under her feet. As it continues to raise her higher and higher into the sky, she spontaneously calls out:

“I’m now the richest person in the entire world! Adorned with these wonderful gems, I’ll be incomparably beautiful; everybody’s eyes will be on me alone!”

Her eyes aflame with vanity, Yanbo bends down, picks up a necklace of translucent gems, and begins to fondle it. In her intoxicated state she thinks:

“Satana, eat your heart out! From now onwards, all eyes will be on me alone!”

As if responding to Yanbo’s words and thoughts, wave upon wave of gorgeous jewels come welling up.

In her crazed glee, Yanbo tries on piece after piece of jewelry, the likes of which she has never seen before.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo — cock-a-doodle-do — ” suddenly the faint crow of a rooster announces the arrival of dawn, whereupon Yanbo feels a strange sense of uneasiness. Bringing her frantic hands to a rest on her hairpin inlaid with pearls, before she can figure out what’s going on, she discovers that she is slowly descending.

Looking down, she is stunned to discover that the jewels are turning into bubbles right before her eyes. Bending down, she tries to pick up the glittering jewels, only to discover that the more she tries, the quicker they disappear. Undeterred, she desperately fills her pockets and sleeves with whatever remaining jewels she can manage to latch onto. Yet, all her efforts come to naught, for in the space of a few minutes, all the precious gems and jewelry have completely disappeared.

“Peng — ” Yanbo comes sliding down from the pile of jewels and lands on the ground.

Covered in sweat and gasping for breath, she clutches the few jewels she managed to salvage and just stares at the bare ground as she stands up. Suddenly feeling as though her feet are icy cold, she looks down and sees that she is standing in a pool of pellucid water reflecting her image—laden with jewels, yet in a most sorry state. Startled by the sight, she releases her grip, whereupon all the jewels drop into the pool with a loud splash.

Pained by the sight of the only remaining jewels falling into the pool, she quickly reaches down to retrieve them. However, as soon as she touches the water, there appears on the surface an image of an elegant yet weary woman who bears a striking resemblance to Yanbo. Startled, Yanbo rubs her cheeks, whereupon the woman springs up out of the image.

“Real beauty has nothing to do with material possessions — ” says the woman in an earnest voice.

“Ah — ” Yanbo shrieks and then flees as fast as she can, with the girl in hot pursuit.

Woken up by her own shrill scream from the dream created by Ranghe, Yanbo jumps off the bed and onto her feet.

In a cold sweat, her heart still fluttering with fear, as she looks around her peaceful and quiet bedroom, then at her jewelry box, she says to herself:

“What a strange dream! How frightful! In no time at all, all those precious gems vanished!”

Setting down the string of diamonds she constantly holds onto, even while sleeping, she walks over to her dressing mirror, and takes a close look at herself. Seeing that she looks like she has just been through some kind of calamity, she takes a deep breath and tells herself:

“Okay, it wasn’t for real! I’m still Yanbo .....” Before she has a chance to write it off as mere fantasy, she suddenly recalls that fearful and sorrowful face, and hesitatingly thinks:

“People really do get old .....” whereupon she stretches out her hand and strokes her cheeks.

“Alas! It really is true: Real beauty has nothing to do with material wealth. And even if I did succeed in seizing all of Satana’s tremendous wealth, no one could guarantee that it would remain mine forever.”

Yanbo slowly walks to the window.

“Even if I possessed all the wealth on Silkworm Island, what good would that be? I’d still get old and lonely, so how could I be happy?”

“I want to live a genuine life together with Yunxing — ”

With a heavy heart, she pushes the window open.

“Oh! Such a beautiful morning!” As the cool breeze and gentle light of the early morning sun fill the room, feeling like she has shed a great burden, Yanbo resolves:

“I will immediately tell Yunxing that we must stop wasting our lives on meaningless pursuits.”

Feeling a sense of peace she has never felt before, Yanbo stretches out her hand and touches the glittering dew.

## 22. Nine Movements of the Mind *Lesser Cold*

Coming at the beginning of the twelfth month in the lunar calendar, Lesser Cold, the twenty-third solar term, is characterized by frigid temperatures. The winter season, the 81 days following the Winter Solstice, is divided into nine nine-day periods. Since ancient times a wide variety of visual aids have been designed for “counting off the nine nines,” i.e., counting down the number of days remaining before spring arrives. One such design consists of a black-on-white sketch of a plum branch with nine blossoms, each having nine petals. On each day of winter, one of the petals is colored red; when all nine blossoms are completely red, spring has finally arrived!

Lesser Cold; a time to use great wisdom to deeply realize the strength of suchness within.

### Six: Motivation

After a long discussion, Yunxing has finally convinced Asuluo to allow Yanbo to consign Silkworm Island’s surplus mulberry crop to outside distilleries.

After leaving the office, Yunxing passes through the dense mulberry groves and ebulliently savors the compliment he just received from Asuluo:

“Yunxing, you sure do pay attention to every detail!”

Even though it took a lot of haggling, in the end Asuluo

accepted his proposal. Always eager to gain approval from others, Yunxing is elated when he recalls Asuluo's compliment and satisfied expression.

Proud and excited, Yunxing goes to find Yanbo and tell her the news, but when he reaches a fork in the road, he suddenly changes his mind and goes in a different direction.

Today the weather on Silkworm Island is especially fine. Humming a happy tune, Yunxing comes to a pond and looks around for a water lily to give to Yanbo.

However, his attention is soon garnered by the sound of excited laughter nearby. Curious to find out where it's coming from, Yunxing briskly walks along a flagstone path bordered by small wildflowers, and soon sees in the distance Pomo surrounded by a group of people seated next to the pond. Although he's too far away to hear what Pomo is saying, hearing the repeated bursts of laughter, Yunxing can't help but jealously say to himself:

"That Pomo sure does think she has a lot charisma! Just look at the fascinated expression on their faces. Little do they know, they're being taken in by her trickery!"

Disdaining to approach and listen, just as Yunxing is turning to leave, he catches sight of a slim and graceful purple lily in the middle of the pond, just beginning to bloom. After hesitating for a moment, as he resignedly walks towards the pond, Pomo's words become increasingly distinct:

“Don’t neglect your horoscope! It has a major impact on a person’s intelligence, wealth, and destiny. Those born at an auspicious time have good luck, and they have a way of turning bad luck into good fortune .....

Self-confident by nature, Yunxing firmly believes that he is capable of accomplishing anything he puts his mind to. Moreover, he’s highly competitive, and always seems to find a way to get his way; as a result, he’s also quite haughty.

Consequently, when he caught wind of Chenwai and Wulu’s plot to seize Satana’s wealth, his inherent sense of blind ambition took over, and he gradually came up with his own plan for disinvesting Satana of all her riches. Thus, Yunxing’s desire to become the master of Silkworm Island is not so much out of greed for wealth, but is rather motivated by his inordinate craving for admiration and prestige. As he sees it, as soon as he succeeds in doing so, he will be lavished with praise and attention.

Yunxing has no interest whatsoever in prognostication, fortune telling, and the like. And even though Pomo is widely renowned for her ability to see the future, he has nothing but disdain for her.

Although he’d much prefer to make a hasty exit, intent on surprising Yanbo with the lily and unwilling to have his purpose defeated so easily, Yunxing nonchalantly draws near and looks for the best way to get at the lily. However, despite his best efforts to ignore Pomo, his attention is inexplicably drawn towards her, and he begins to listen to her expound her esoteric doctrines:

“Much like the stars in the galaxy, all phenomena may seem to be discreet, independent entities, but in fact, all things are completely interdependent; everything is constantly influencing everything else .....”

As if being moved by some unseen force, Yunxing draws near, whereupon Pomo praises him in front of her audience:

“Take Yunxing for example. From his physiognomy and bone structure, you can see that he is a first-rate leader—his full forehead; the plumb and smooth space between his eyebrows; the deep and long middle line of his upper lip; and his slim and well-proportioned bone structure. As anyone can see, he is quite an important person on Silkworm Island .....”

As he continues to listen, Yunxing gradually begins to find Pomo’s ideas rather interesting, and also starts to accept them. What he especially likes are the admiring glances he receives from the others in the audience every time she talks about physiognomy.

“Kerplunk — ” losing his footing, Yunxing falls into the pond. Though not a bad swimmer, in the dense clusters of stalks and leaves he can’t get anywhere. As he frantically thrashes about, he churns the water into lovely bubbles.

“Wow! Yunxing really is extraordinary; even his way of swimming is unique.”

“Indeed! Look at those beautiful bubbles he’s churning up!”

“Yunxing, encore!”

“Don’t stop, Yunxing. Let’s see another move!”

As Yunxing sinks deeper into the water, all the onlookers are full of praise, but nobody comes to his rescue. Now in a panic, as soon as he opens his mouth to call out for help, the water rushes in and stifles his voice. Choking on the water, the more he struggles, the faster he sinks. The cold water fills his mouth, ears, and eyes..... he can't see a thing.

“..... All things in the universe are constantly changing; if you don't understand this, you'll never be able to understand yourself. Blindly pursuing such things will only land you in a deep quagmire, in which case, who is going to respect or admire you? What's more, getting along well with others requires sincerity and genuine concern .....” All of a sudden, Yunxing hears a pleasant voice and discovers that he is lying next to the pond. Nearby Zhiyue is leisurely speaking to a group of people:

“At sunset the light returns to its home. When the golden drum of the sun sets in the west, it doesn't disappear for good; this is something the farmers on Kengeng's Farm see every day .....”

Feeling as though he has somehow entered into another time and place, and in a completely novel frame of mind, Yunxing calmly listens.

As Zhiyue patiently answers endless questions from the audience, his wise and compassionate words instill Yunxing with a marvelous feeling.

As she goes on dispelling their doubts, her noble bearing and pure, sonorous voice penetrate deeply into Yunxing's mind, like an

auspicious, bright cloud gently floating into his heart.

“Why do people have such heartfelt admiration for her?”  
Yunxing wonders about Zhiyue.

With unbounded generosity, the radiant Zhiyue continuously shares her wisdom with her listeners. Moreover, from the way she is esteemed and honored, Yunxing suddenly comes to realize that arrogance and making endless demands on others only breeds conflict, and that only through sincere giving is it possible to gain genuine respect and praise from others.

Then he begins to introspect, examining all his past actions, attitudes, goals .....

“In fact, I’ve never truly considered what I really want .....  
Actually, selfless giving is the way to gain respect .....”

Just as Yunxing is feeling as if things are finally starting to make sense, a loud burst of laughter rouses him from his sleep. Opening his eyes, he discovers that everything he just heard was spoken not by Zhiyue, but by Pomo!

“Eh! Am I dreaming?” As if just waking from a dream, Yunxing feels rather disoriented.

Pomo’s strange ideas, coupled with the fanatical enthusiasm of her listeners, disturbs the tranquility of the pond.

After sitting motionlessly for a long while, as if rapt in attention, Yunxing suddenly jumps up and leaves. But before he can get very far, he hears Pomo calling him back and senses that all eyes are on him. Though previously he always wanted to be the center

of attention, at this moment Yunxing anxiously wishes he could disappear.

Ranghe looks on as Yunxing hastens in his direction. Yunxing's handsome face now sports a beaming countenance, and the wonderful purple lily in his hand slowly begins to open.

### **Seven: Impetus**

With the aid of the mild light emanating from the purple lily in Yunxing's hand, Ranghe sees that there are a large number of transparent silk threads entangling Silkworm Island, whereupon he turns his attention to their source.

As is his wont, upon waking up in the morning, Chenwai lays in bed and admires the splendid pipe-dream he has woven for himself in the Cocoon Room.

“It seems that everything is going according to plan: Asuluo is increasingly infatuated with me, and Satana already has more faith in me than in Yunxing. With a bit more effort, soon Silkworm Island will be mine.”

After gloating in this manner for some time, he rolls over, jumps out of bed, and admiringly looks around his Cocoon Room which brings him so much inspiration and so many ideas. After carefully combing his hair, he happily departs for his rendezvous with Asuluo.

Today a soft breeze is blowing, and Asuluo is in an especially good mood. Seeing her bright, smiling face, Chenwai is sure that Asuluo has fallen into his trap.

As they happily stroll through the dark, cool forest, Asuluo is in an animated mood and candidly talks all about her life and various matters pertaining to Silkworm Island. From the frankness with which she speaks, Chenwai gets a different impression of Asuluo.

This is the first time Chenwai has really seen into Asuluo's inner world. As it turns out, behind her competent persona, Asuluo has a pure heart, whereas Chenwai is quite the opposite.

At high noon they sit down next to a large tree and enjoy a sumptuous picnic. Afterwards, Asuluo leisurely reclines at the base of the tree and takes a nap while Chenwai quietly looks on. Moved by Asuluo's angelic appearance, Chenwai thinks back on all that she told him while they were strolling, then says to himself:

“Asuluo would certainly make a good wife!”

Although Chenwai is startled by this unexpected notion of his, his sincerity is picked up by Ranghe, who makes a half-smile.

Thereupon Chenwai has second thoughts about using the kind-hearted Asuluo to pilfer Satana's wealth. Continuing to observe Asuluo's happy countenance, he realizes that while she is completely sincere, he has never once been sincere towards her. Suddenly Chenwai feels the impulse to find Wulu and tell her that they need to find a way of seizing Silkworm Island without harming the innocent and pure Asuluo. But when he remembers that their nefarious plot is

about to come to fruition, his train of thought is thrown into confusion. As a battle between emotion and reason heatedly wages on in his heart, Chenwai's happy mood flies off into outer space. Taking a deep sigh, he stands up and gloomily gazes out on the vast open space in front of them.

In the heat of the afternoon, a vapor rises up and covers the grassy hills and distant mountains. Observed from within the shade, the steamy vapor seems to continuously rise up from the ground.

Ever fond of optical illusions, Chenwai is fascinated by the strange sight. In a moment, he falls into a fantasy world, and feels an irresistible impulse to have a closer look at the beautiful world behind the vapor.

Forgetting all about Asuluo, Chenwai looks at the fierce sun and then excitedly makes his way towards the open field. Under the swirling waves of vapor, he roves about in an imaginary world beyond the laws of nature.

After going some distance, Chenwai suddenly sees the shiny surface of a body of water not far off, but as he walks towards it, it seems to move away from him, as if it's toying with him.

Feeling parched and light-headed in the scorching heat, Chenwai becomes even more determined to reach the lake, wash his face, and have a good drink.

Energetically walking straight ahead without realizing that his strength is waning fast, he suddenly hears Asuluo's faint voice:

“Chenwai! What are you doing? Going around like that in the scorching sun you’ll come down with sunstroke. Hurry back over here!”

Roused from his reverie by Asuluo’s voice, he realizes that Asuluo is still under the tree. Slowing down his pace, he looks at the vapor rising out of the lake and says:

“I’m almost there; I can’t give up now!”

Ignoring Asuluo’s call, he grits his teeth and willfully proceeds, bent on finding the lake in his fantasy. Suddenly the vapor becomes thicker; taking a close look, he sees that the vapor is rising up from a vast lake.

“Wow! Fantastic!”

Excitedly expending his last ounce of energy, he leaps into the cool water. Overcome by giddiness, he soon loses consciousness .....

“Oh! You’ve finally woken up. You really had me worried!”

When Chenwai comes to he is exhaustedly lying in the shade of the tree. Staring attentively with a concerned expression, Asuluo anxiously fans him.

Seeing that he has come to, Asuluo quickly pours a cup of tepid tea and has him drink it, and then says with a slightly reproachful tone:

“Whatever did you see that made you want to brave the ferocious sun like that? I was calling out to you for such a long time, but you didn’t seem to hear me. Then you fainted and fell to the ground; it was nearly beyond my ability, but somehow I managed to

drag you back under the shade of the tree!”

Hearing Asuluo’s words, Chenwai finally realizes that he fainted due to sunstroke, and that the lake was just an illusion. Seeing Asuluo’s tender face red with worry and dripping in sweat, Chenwai spontaneously says:

“When I saw those vast streams of vapor rising up, I thought that there must be a lake over there, so I decided to try and find it while you were taking a nap!”

Puzzled, Asuluo curiously looks out into the distance, but doesn’t see anything that even resembles a body of water.

“Funny, I don’t see any vapor.”

Seeing the puzzled look on Asuluo’s face, Chenwai points in the direction where he thought he had seen the glimmer of water.

“That’s not vapor; it’s heat haze!” says Asuluo smilingly, as she squints and takes a closer look.

“Heat haze?”

“That’s right! It’s so hot today that there is a heat haze rising up from the ground .....” says Asuluo. Seeing Chenwai’s puzzled expression, she explains, “Perhaps in the refracted sunlight it looked like vapor.”

Not completely convinced, Chenwai gathers together all his wits and looks again. This time the vapor is even clearer and more abundant.

Looking at the silent Chenwai and then at the heat haze wavering in the distance, Asuluo says:

“Do you know what a mirage is? Perhaps the vapor you thought you saw was just an optical illusion. I suppose you must have been so parched that you lost your wits and saw a mirage. If you have any doubts, then wait until the sun isn’t so hot and then have another look.”

Handing Chenwai a damp towel, noticing that his stubbornness persists even in his feeble state, Asuluo keenly sees how tightly Chenwai is bound up in his peculiar views. Not quite clear about just what those ideas might be, hoping she can help Chenwai untie some mental knots, she thinks it over for a moment before saying:

“I’ve been here on Silkworm Island for so long now. Do you know the most important thing I’ve learned during all this time?”

Chenwai curiously looks at Asuluo and says:

“What is it?”

“With a lot of hard work, Satana transformed Silkworm Island from a barren island into a place of great beauty and prosperity. Yet the general impression is that it all came about as a mere stroke of luck. But having been with Satana for so long, I now know that success is not merely a matter of luck and good timing; more importantly, it also requires practicality and a lot of hard work. Lots of people would like to become as wealthy as Satana, but few are able to do so. That’s because they don’t have their feet on the ground; they just fantasize all day, while enjoying the fruits of others’ work, but they don’t make any effort themselves.

Pausing, Asuluo looks out at the rippling waves of heat. After

pondering for quite a while, she slowly says:

“So, this is why I have an aspiration — ”

Asuluo’s words happen to pierce a secret place deep in Chenwai’s heart, making him feel that she must be talking about him. Sensing that she has more to say, he anxiously says:

“What’s your aspiration? It must be quite special!”

“Wulu, Yunxing, Yanbo, and yourself are all very talented and capable, and you’ve all been a great help to Satana. I hope that all of you will make the most of your talents so that one day you can realize your own dreams. Especially you, Chenwai.” Having had her say, the blushing Asuluo turns, stands up and looks out on the heat haze becoming less distinct as the sun slants westwards. Then she says in a relaxed yet earnest tone:

“Don’t be fooled by unrealistic fantasies! Chasing after a chimera will only waste your time and bring you a lot of trouble.”

As Asuluo’s words again pummel Chenwai’s concealed preoccupation, an icy wind blows through his secret fantasy world. Hoping to conceal his guilty conscience, acting as if nothing is troubling him, Chenwai shifts his gaze into the distance. Realizing that what he earlier thought was vapor is in fact heat haze, just as Asuluo told him, a cold tremor jolts his heart and he wonders:

“Will all the plans Wulu and I have put so much effort into in recent days all come to naught, just like the vapor I thought I saw over the fields?”

“Oh my! Day in and day out, together with Wulu I’ve been

foolishly plotting to seize Satana's wealth. Is this all there is to life? .....” wonders Chenwai earnestly, no longer able to keep his thoughts in check.

At that very moment, due to the support of Ranghe's vow, Chenwai finally realizes the folly of his ways, whereupon the chimeras occupying his mind gradually disappear like the morning mist being burned off by the first rays of the rising sun.

As the afternoon clouds float across the boundless sky, a cool and gentle breeze blows over the hot, dry fields.

### **Eight: Returning to the Source**

Ever since she woke up early this morning, Wulu has been feeling out of sorts. Although she's known all along about Chenwai's meeting with Asuluo, when noontime arrived and there was still no sight of Chenwai, she couldn't help but feel jealous. Yet, upon thinking things over, she realizes that all this is her own plan, and does her best to hold her jealousy in check.

Feeling restless and uneasy after waiting in her room all morning, she takes a notebook and goes out to the garden.

As the iris blossoms tug at her dress like so many spoiled children, the cool and refreshing breeze puts her in a better mood.

As is her custom, Wulu goes to the banana grove she adores so much. After leisurely sitting on the grass, she opens her notebook and reviews the projects she is currently working on; she also thinks

about the changes she would like to make to Silkworm Island so that it expresses her personal style.

As the faint afternoon breeze imperceptibly strokes Wulu's face, now smiling, now frowning, it senses what's on her mind and then silently transmits the news to Ranghe.

After meticulously framing her plans, Wulu takes a deep breath, closes her notebook, leisurely reclines on the soft grass, and hums a melodious tune.

As the white clouds wander about in the azure sky, from time to time a cluster drifts in front of the sun. The ashen wings of the clouds elicit in Wulu a feeling that she has long kept buried in a dark corner of her heart. Although she is as pretty as the azure sky, there lurks in her heart a certain gloominess which resurfaces each time she stops humming.

In addition to her good looks, Wulu knows how to get along with others, for which reason people are attracted to her, and she likes to think of herself as being popular. But when she is with Satana, all the adoring looks go to Satana, making her feel inferior. Add to this her secret plans for seizing Satana's wealth, and it comes as no surprise that she is highly suspicious of others, with the result that she feels quite lonely. Because he is part of her plot, Chenwai is her only confidant, and even though she doesn't fully trust him, she has a special, complex feeling for him. Although she doesn't admit to herself that she likes Chenwai, every time she sees him with Asuluo she becomes filled with jealousy.

A cute little squirrel scampering amongst the thickly leaved tree branches suddenly jumps down next to Wulu. Startled, she instinctively sits up. Frightened by her sudden movement, the vivacious squirrel jumps onto a banana leaf. However, the leaf collapses under the weight of the squirrel, who tumbles down and lands on Wulu's lap. Recognizing that this is the same squirrel who often comes to cavort with her, Wulu smiles and goes back to reclining on the grass.

Before long, the squirrel returns to its mischievous ways, sniffing and looking around as it playfully circles Wulu. Taking some nuts out of her pocket, she feeds them to the squirrel, who excitedly expresses its pleasure by calling out, "ka-cha — ka-cha — "

Watching the trusting squirrel on her lap eating the nuts, she indignantly says:

"Wait until I become the owner of Silkworm Island; then you will see everybody fawning on me, attending to my every beck and call. Right now I may be as lonely as you are, but before long everything is going to change; just wait and see!"

Hearing Wulu's soliloquy in the lush garden, Ranghe gets a clear idea of the condition afflicting her heart.

Listlessly lying on the grass, as Wulu considers so many weighty issues—her friendless state; the great wealth of Silkworm Island; her future status and power—her eyelids gradually grow heavy. Soon she enters into the dream world Ranghe has set up just for her —

“The new owner of Silkworm Island has arrived!”

When the elegant and poised Wulu, entourage in tow, gracefully emerges from the stately Palace of One Hundred Flowers, a jolt of excitement shoots through the crowd and a great round of applause resounds across the skies.

Visibly pleased with the enthusiastic cheers, Wulu tries to appear demure as she waves to the admiring crowds. Looking over the waves of people craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the woman they admire so much, she is pleased at heart. It was all in order to gain this great prestige that she worked so long and so hard to supplant Satana as the owner of Silkworm Island.

Wulu has specially selected the Palace of One Hundred Flowers on the southern part of the island as the venue for her installment as the new leader of Silkworm Island, and has personally designed the splendid ceremony to include a wide range of extraordinary performances. Greatly pleased at the thought that the hoopla is all about her, she savors her first taste of the sweet flavor of wealth and power.

Surrounded by a retinue several hundred strong, Wulu slowly makes her way through the densely packed crowds to the meticulously decorated concourse. With her maidservant leading the way, as she approaches the throne encircled by hundreds of flowers, a hush suddenly falls over the excited crowd. All eyes are on the slim and graceful Wulu as she approaches the throne, step by measured step.

“Swoosh — ” a great bevy of flower petals comes pouring

down from the sky, bathing everything in a shower of radiant color, giving rise a another round of excited applause.

Seeing all of this pomp and splendor meant just for her, Wulu is thoroughly pleased as she mounts the coveted throne.

“Wulu — ” suddenly she hears a familiar voice, causing her to stumble.

“Oh! It’s Chenwai.....” says Wulu, as her heart rate begins to accelerate. Just a few steps from the magnificent throne, Chenwai’s voice distracts her attention.

“Wulu! You’ve forgotten our agreement!”

Catching sight of Chenwai on the other side of the thickly packed crowd, his eyes glaring, Wulu closely follows Chenwai’s indignant face. As the cheers gradually subside, Wulu reminds herself to maintain her composure and quickly sit on the beautiful throne, for nothing is more important to her than being enthroned as the owner of Silkworm Island.

When Wulu finally sits on the throne, a fanfare of stately music busts forth, followed by a loud round of applause, conveniently dispensing with the tense atmosphere created by the face off a moment ago.

Looking utterly pleased, Wulu proudly gazes out on the admiring crowd. Suddenly there is a commotion nearby, and Wulu sees Chenwai with Asuluo, desperately trying to break through the crowd.

“Oh — I’d better do something. He may be just a pawn, but

just to humor him, perhaps I should throw him a bone!” Wulu quickly determines.

“Let him come! He’s my friend,” As soon as Wulu gives the order, the crowd makes way, and Chenwai and Asuluo run up to the throne decorated with silk brocades and bouquets of flowers.

“Wulu, how vile of you! In order to get all this you betrayed me!” says Chenwai before Wulu has a chance to open her mouth.

Livid with rage, Wulu says:

“You’re so emotional. I’ve never forced you to do anything.”

Chenwai is silent for a moment.

“Yet, I’m willing to share with you everything I have .....

“Wulu! I’m not asking you for anything. You may now be the owner of Silkworm Island, but from today onwards you no longer have any control over me. You — you’re nothing in comparison to Asuluo!” says Chenwai before taking Asuluo’s hand and leaving without turning around.

Seeing Chenwai departing with Asuluo hand-in-hand, Wulu is suddenly overcome by loneliness, and an affection she has never felt before ruthlessly pierces her heart. Thereupon she finally realizes what Chenwai meant to her, and keenly feels that she can’t live without him. Impelled by an irresistible urge to bring Chenwai back, she stands up from the throne .....

“Chenwai — Chenwai — ” With tears running down her face, Wulu is woken up by her own somniloquy.

Not sure if it was real or just a dream, she jumps to her feet and rushes off to find Chenwai. Stumbling along, she trips and tumbles to the ground below the banana trees, whereupon she finally realizes that she was just dreaming.

The splendid ceremony now vanished, Wulu is again her humdrum self. With tears of sorrow rolling down her face, Wulu nervously reviews the frightful dream and wishes that Chenwai were by her side.

Wearily standing up, as she sadly looks at the banana trees she and Chenwai planted together, her attention is drawn to one which has toppled over.

“Is it hollow?” she wonders. Taking a closer look at the jade-green trunk, the source of all its branches and leaves, she sees that it is indeed hollow.

Thereupon, as if the sound of an ancient bell has just rung in Wulu’s heart, she gradually realizes the utter folly of everything she has been doing; that for all her toil and scheming, all she could possibly gain are loneliness and ephemeral enjoyments.

“All conditioned things are impermanent; this is the teaching of the Tathagata!” A chanting voice slowly comes from a boat in the distance.

## **Nine: Returning to the Essence**

Seeing the teary-eyed Wulu staring at the severed trunk, Ranghe calls out, “It looks like Satana is next!” and then surveys the lovely scenery of Silkworm Island .....

After joining Zhiyue and Kengeng in supplicating Ranghe, Enguang has been plagued by waves of doubt. For he has not actually seen Ranghe make his appearance, nor has he noticed any change in Yunxing and the others. Thus he remains skeptical as he closely observes their every move.

Several anxious days later, and still no sign of Ranghe, unable to bear the anxiety any longer, Enguang suddenly goes to Satana and tells her all about how her underlings are planning to seize all her wealth. In the process, his concern and sincerity become evident to Satana.

On the one hand, the ingenuous Satana is shocked by what she hears; on the other hand, she is intrigued by the idea that somehow she has come to play the leading role in a drama so fascinating that it seems to be a chapter straight out of the Arabian Nights.

After listening with wonderment to all that Enguang has to say, Santana’s puzzled expression gradually begins to change and she falls into a reverie. Without really perceiving Satana’s state of mind, the easily swayed Enguang is captivated by her expression. Suddenly, unable to hold back his suppressed feelings for a moment longer, his

concealed affection comes bursting out, whereupon he also falls into a reverie.

As each of them remain in their respective reveries, something really strange happens.

Thousands upon thousands of dazzlingly colorful butterflies swiftly fly up and converge in the sky over Silkworm Island, creating a beautiful phantasmagoria.

Gradually forming into lines, the butterflies take on the appearance of colorful streams and flow over the mountains, gardens, and valleys.

In no time at all, everyone on the island is excitedly and garrulously watching as the innumerable butterflies with brightly colored wings fill up every corner of the island.

Then an extraordinary mood comes over the entire island. Gazing upon such a lovely sight, who could have imagined that concealed under each lovely wing is a dugu, a type of poisonous insect! Having fallen into a world of imaginary beauty, no one has noticed that the ground is already covered with dugus.

### 23. Consciousness *Greater Cold*

Greater Cold is the last of the 24 solar terms; it's also the coldest. This is the time for salting meat and fish in preparation for the coming year. "Three big snowfalls in Greater Cold; food and clothing aplenty." The origin of this agricultural proverb is the belief that several heavy snowfalls will kill the locust eggs, thus averting a locust plague in the coming year.

In Greater Cold, great heroism, fortitude, and mercy defeat the forces of evil.

"Asuluo — Asuluo — "

Hearing Yanbo's anxious voice, Asuluo leaves her dressing mirror and opens the window.

Asuluo is stunned by what she sees.

In the early morning light all she can see are butterflies, some in the sky, others perched on the tips of branches like magnificent flower blossoms.

Unable to believe her eyes, she hesitatingly stretches out her arm and lightly touches a butterfly perched on a nearby branch. Only after nudging it a third time does it take to wing and fly away.

Overnight, the butterflies have increased not only in number, but also in splendor.

With her gaze riveted on the amazing spectacle, Asuluo can't quite wrap her mind around what she's looking at. Then she catches

sight of Zhiyue and Kengeng shuttling around amongst the butterfly-filled mulberry trees, and an idea comes to her. Walking out the door and through the swarm of butterflies, she goes up to Zhiyue and Kengeng and tells them her doubts.

Unexpectedly, she hears something astonishing.

After listening to her questions, Kengeng asks her:

“Asuluo, do you know why all these butterflies have suddenly appeared?”

“Huh?” Asuluo is dumbstruck by the question.

“It’s all because Satana has been playing the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates!”

“Satana? The Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates .....?” asks Asuluo with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Satana is no ordinary person! She was born with the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates and the Kapila Incantation — the most formidable weapons used by the Lord of the Five Aggregates for bewildering and controlling people. Although ingenuous and kind by nature, whoever gets close to her gets entangled in the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates and the Kapila Incantation, as a result of which they come under the control of the Lord of the Five Aggregates and engage in all manner of wicked deeds, and ultimately reap the bitter fruits. If Enguang gets close to Satana, he will surely suffer the same fate.”

Asuluo is taken aback by what she hears.

Considering how close she is to Satana, Asuluo looks at Kengeng and Zhiyue and says:

“Isn’t there something we can do? Satana herself is not to blame. Kengeng, Zhiyue, you have to think of something!”

Seeing how earnest, devoted, and concerned she is, Zhiyue nods and says:

“Asuluo! Curing Satana’s chronic ailment won’t be easy. It will require one thousand eighty bodhi seeds for countering the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates, as well as finding Ranghe and entreating him to use a certain powerful samadhi—the Foremost Surangama King—to destroy the Kapila Incantation. Finally, the only way to drive out the hordes of dugus is to find the Lord of Lebang and ask him to use his unsurpassably powerful Ganlu Mantra .....”

Listening to Zhiyue’s words, Asuluo’s face turns a whiter shade of pale and she blurts out in a trembling voice:

“Hoard of dugus?”

“Asuluo, these aren’t really butterflies, they are dugus summoned here by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates for the purpose of leading people astray!” Zhiyue’s words leave Asuluo speechless.

Thereupon, Kengeng slowly says:

“I have to hurry back to my homeland and gather up one thousand eighty bodhi seeds. Zhiyue, you stay here and think of a way to find Ranghe. This way, perhaps we can save Silkworm Island from this calamity!”

The beautiful owner of Silkworm Island is finally getting married, and everybody in the Palace of the Silkworm Queen is busy spreading the news.

“Du-du-du .....

“Why do we need to undertake spiritual discipline?” Enguang asks somewhat timidly.

“So that we can become calm and sober, and remain that way!” the sage replies smilingly.

“I don’t practice any spiritual discipline; yet I feel quite calm and sober!” says Enguang.

“In that case, just take good care of your original nature—and remember everything you’ve said!” says the sage as he tenderly strokes Enguang’s head. Then he pulls out a small wooden fish and gives it to Enguang.

The voice of the Baihua Stream flows clearly.

As Enguang wakes up early in the morning his face is slightly cold; as he gets out of bed he discovers that there are tears in his eyes  
.....

The thought that he is about to get married to Satana fills him with such joy that he forgets all about the sound of the wooden fish he heard in his dream last night.

Ever since the arrival of the swarms of butterflies, amazing sights have appeared every day on Silkworm Island. Just as everyone is intoxicated by the wonderful, heavenly sights, the sinister dugus hiding under their lovely wings begin to stir.

Receiving the extraordinary news, the endlessly wandering Ranghe returns to Silkworm Island unnoticed, just as Kengeng is returning with the one thousand eighty bodhi seeds.

Kengeng and Zhiyue ceaselessly observe the changes happening on the island.

Today the clever Suanni brings back a strange-looking butterfly on the verge of death, seeing which Zhiyue worriedly says:

“These dugus are getting stranger all the time. If nothing is done to stop them, then we’re all in for a real catastrophe!”

“Right! Now is the time to act,” says Kengeng. Pondering the situation, he turns to Zhiyue and says:

“We can begin to carry out Ranghe’s plan. Zhiyue, think of a way to get Satana by herself, so as to avoid any unexpected difficulties.”

After her discussion with Zhiyue and Kengeng last night, Asuluo hasn’t been able to sleep. In accordance with Zhiyue’s instructions, while meticulously thinking of how to keep Satana from falling into harm’s way, she can’t help but sobbing.

When the first rays of sunlight begin to make their way through the white curtains and into the room, Asuluo quickly gets out of bed and with a heavy heart goes to check on the soundly sleeping

Satana.

As Asuluo worriedly paces back and forth amongst the rose bushes laden with dew, the sunlight begins to illuminate Satana's glass bedroom.

"Asuluo — " Satana's mellifluous voice instantly dispels Asuluo's weariness.

"Oh! Why are your eyes all red?" asks Satana concernedly.

"Yesterday Zhiyue told me that she and Kengeng found a very strange butterfly in the western mulberry grove; I was so worried about it that I couldn't sleep ....."

"Really! Why didn't anyone tell me about it?" interrupts Satana.

"She asked me to take you to see it. The sun is already out; we'd better hurry," says the quick-witted Asuluo, so as not to make Satana suspicious.

However, as they quickly make their way towards the western mulberry grove, they happen to meet up with Enguang, and Satana invites him to go with them.

"Kengeng — " seeing Kengeng and his Suanni off in the distance chasing an evasive butterfly, Enguang shouts out and runs in their direction.

Seeing Enguang, the fierce yet friendly Suanni happily runs towards him and leaps up on his chest. Unable to resist the Suanni's momentum, Enguang falls backwards and they both go tumbling onto the grass. Seeing them tangled up together on the grass, Satana breaks

into joyous laughter.

Just as Satana's mirthful laughter is rippling through the open fields, innumerable butterflies make their dramatic appearance. Like so many decked out guests rushing off to a banquet, the butterflies fill the sun-drenched fields, their brilliant colors spinning out a gorgeous spectacle.

Delighted by the marvelous sight, after looking on for a moment in curious admiration, Satana joins the Suanni in chasing after the gracefully fluttering butterflies.

The nimble Suanni leads Satana far out into the field.

"Asuluo, take care of Enguang! Keep him away from Satana," Zhiyue calls out.

When the Suanni leads Satana into the middle of the one thousand eighty bodhi seeds laid out in a circle, the bodhi seeds give off a magnetic wave which dispels defilement. Thereupon Satana experiences a terrible pain in her head.

Then Zhiyue and Kengeng rush over to the periphery of the circle and sit facing the west. After closing their eyes and entering into a state of deep concentration, they begin repeating the Ganlu Mantra, whereupon the pain in Satana's head becomes even more intense, as if ten thousand ants were boring into her brain.

Having taken Enguang over to the side of a large boulder, with tears dancing in her eyes, Asuluo explains their plan for saving Satana. When they turn around to see what's happening, they see Satana with her hands on her head, suffering excruciating pain, trying to find a way

out of the circle.

Just then, the purifying power of the bodhi seeds collides with the Kapila Incantation, now bearing down menacingly with the terrible force of a rushing torrent, as it tries to seize the upper hand.

Next, the treacherous Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates reacts to the unusual sound with great fury. Tightly winding round Satana, she flails about with a strange, pale expression on her face.

“Asuluo! I don’t think Satana can hold up any longer; we’d better take her out!” says Enguang, greatly distressed as he watches Satana rolling on the ground in anguish and looking around with a malicious expression.

Looking at Asuluo’s ghostly white face and sensing that this is no simple matter, Enguang begins to run towards the circle, but Zhiyue holds him back from behind.

“Enguang, look — ” says Zhiyue, motioning into the distance.

“Ranghe!” shouts Enguang.

Like an auspicious golden cloud, Ranghe slowly walks into the circle of bodhi seeds and sits cross-legged on a stone in front of Satana.

As if sensing the arrival of a more formidable adversary, the Kapila Incantation musters up all its diabolical power. Looking not quite human, Satana struggles to break out of the circle. Meticulously arranged by Kengeng, the bodhi seeds throw up a dense screen of light which holds the Kapila Incantation in check, as the clever Suanni

patrols the periphery.

The Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates responds by raising a frenzied howl which sends a terrible convulsion through everything in the vicinity. Then a colorful cloud of smoke rises up next to Satana and begins to drift about.

Buffeted by the wind, the grass and leaves give off a sound as sharp as arrows shooting through space. As the sun begins to weaken, Silkworm Island is pervaded by a bleak senses of foreboding.

As they look on in terror, an auspicious light unexpectedly appears in the sky. Enguang instinctively goes towards the place where Ranghe is still sitting in samadhi, and sees an auspicious light rising up around Ranghe. The wind gradually begins to settle, yet Satana continues to scream out to Asuluo and Enguang in a tortured voice.

Instructed by Zhiyue, Asuluo and Enguang chant Ranghe's mantra. Then they discover that the butterflies, as if summoned by some unseen force, attack the screen of light thrown up by the bodhi seeds.

Just then, a fierce wind blows in from all sides, hurling about sand, pebbles, and shards of rock; at the same time uprooting the plants and making the rivers overflow their banks, threatening to pulverize Silkworm Island.

Now in a frenzy, the colorful butterflies dash against the light screen, whereupon their wings break off and they fall to the ground. Wave upon wave, they continue to rush headlong into the jaws of death; soon the ground is covered with their corpses.

As the Suanni helps ward off the butterflies, Ranghe, still sitting perfectly still, telepathically informs Zhiyue and Kengeng that he is now going to make a direct attack on Satana's chronic back ailment. He tells them to distract Satana's attention while he concentrates all his mental energy on bringing the power of the bodhi seeds into full play.

As Ranghe concentrates on Satana's back, she repeatedly makes bloodcurdling shrieks. With their combined efforts, the colored clouds begin to thin out and finally disappear. Then Satana, her face devoid of all color, collapses to the ground, the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates suddenly ceases, and the sunlight reappears.

Asuluo and Enguang breathe a deep sigh of relief at the thought that the ordeal has come to an end. As they get ready to make a move they notice that a worried expression has suddenly appeared on the faces of Zhiyue and Kengeng.

As it turns out, now that the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates has been subdued, the even more formidable Kapila Incantation has become even more powerful. In the bright sunlight they see glimmering silver threads extending from Satana on all sides and climbing up the light screen. The innumerable silk threads densely entwine around the beams of light, threatening to crush them to pieces. What's more, the dead butterflies covering the ground have transformed into hideous dugus with glittering sharp teeth and are gnawing away at the bodhi seeds.

With the silk threads above and the dugus below, the one thousand eighty bodhi seeds are in a precarious situation. Seeing the sudden turn of events, Asuluo is terrified. Enguang, however, rushes forward.

As it turns out, owing to his affection for Satana, just as he let down his guard a moment ago, Enguang has fallen into the grip of the Kapila Incantation. Anguished by the sight of Satana suffering so terribly as she cries out for help with the piteous expression in her eyes, fearing that her life may be in danger, Enguang rushes forward, intending to get her out of the circle.

Asuluo tries her best to restrain Enguang, but there is no way to hold him back. Pushing her away, she falls to the ground and he rushes towards Satana as fast as he can.

Just in the nick of time, like a flash of lightning, the Suanni leaps out of nowhere and tackles Enguang. Then the Suanni makes a thundering roar and Enguang comes back to his senses.

Just then, Ranghe is sitting face-to-face with Satana, emitting from between his eyebrows a beam of soft golden light which directly enters the space between Satana's eyebrows.

Observing the golden light, Asuluo falls into a strange, yet somehow familiar, state of deep serenity.

“Oh! It’ the Foremost Surangama King!” shouts Zhiyue.

Just then, unable to hold up to the pincer attack of the dugus and silk threads, the light curtain shatters into innumerable glowing fragments and falls to the ground, whereupon a serene countenance

appears on Satana's face. At that very instant, a bright golden light streams forth from between Ranghe's eyebrows, filling the sky. Thereupon the glowing fragments and silk threads transform into ray upon ray of pure light which completely melds with the golden light.

The purifying energy of the boundless golden light infuses everybody with a profound sense of joy.

Having remained perfectly still while using his powerful samadhi to overcome the Kapila Incantation, Ranghe finally cracks his eyes, glances at the setting sun, and stands up.

"Hurry up and get rid of these dugus! If they get close to Satana, then all our efforts will have been in vain!" Zhiyue suddenly calls out, bringing Asuluo back to her senses.

As the relentlessly gnawing dugus get ever closer to finishing off the bodhi seeds, Kengeng, Zhiyue, and the Suanni desperately try to eliminate them, but there are simply too many.

As if he has not heard Zhiyue's admonition, Ranghe continues to silently and motionlessly gaze at the sun setting in the west.

As the golden-red rays of the setting sun fall ever closer to the vast horizon, a warm and fragrant glow fills the sky.

Taking on an increasingly ruddy appearance, gathering in its dazzling glow, the sun finally descends into its home beyond the western horizon.

Wishing he could take on for himself all Satana's suffering, Enguang looks at the dugus about to break through the ring of bodhi seeds, then at Ranghe, whereupon he notices that Ranghe is holding a

golden drum.

As the sun continues to slowly set, Ranghe remains motionless.

“Dong — dong — dong — dong-dong-dong — ” The earth begins to quake.

Gazing intently at Ranghe, Enguang discovers that the golden light of the setting sun is entering into the golden drum in Ranghe’s hand, and that the drum is giving off the sublime and vigorous sound of the “Drum King Dharani”:

“Amṛta — Amṛta — ”

“It’s Ganlu! Ganlu is using the setting sun to transmit the sound from Lebang!” says Zhiyue, delighted beyond measure.

“Amṛta — Amṛta — ”

Following the sound of the drum, the esoteric sound of the Lebang Pure Land is transmitted throughout the universe, purifying and setting at ease everything it contacts.

Enveloped by the utterly pure sound, the ferocious dugus slow down and then drop to the ground.

Everything becomes silent.

“Look! The butterflies are flying up again!” shouts Asuluo.

Suddenly, as if waking from a dream, innumerable butterflies begin to flap their wings, then together fly off in the direction of the setting sun. Thereupon Zhiyue sighs and says:

“Asuluo, the butterflies have returned to their beautiful

selves.”

Everybody is deeply moved by the extraordinarily beautiful sight!

Suddenly, just before it disappears, the golden-red sun gives off a final burst of splendid color, bathing heaven and earth in a magnificent golden sheen.

The pure light fills everyone’s eyes and hearts!

.....

After some time, as the sun drops beyond the horizon and its magnificent golden light begins to fade, Enguang comes back to his senses and sees that everything appears normal again. Then he notices that it is completely quiet and that he is all alone!

“What? Where did everybody disappear to? Is this a dream?”

In a panic, he calls out:

“Satana — Satana — ”

“Kengeng — Zhiyue — Asuluo — ”

Receiving no response, terror grips his heart, and he runs towards the lush mulberry groves and sets about desperately searching every corner of Silkworm Island.

Silkworm Island is a lovely as before, but everyone has disappeared, except for the lonely and forlorn Enguang.

Utterly perplexed by the strange turn of events, Enguang faints. At the same time, terrible gales and monstrous waves rise up from the sea, and in a moment swallow the entire island in one gulp.

Time and space disappear!

Amongst the gauzy clouds reflected in the vast expanse of choppy water, there appears a small, rudderless boat. Still unconscious, Enguang lies on the lonely boat as it drifts about, blown here by the wind, pulled there by the waves.

*Amrita* 

# *Chapter 6*



## Chapter 6

### 24. Ganlu and Ranghe *Birth of Spring*

Coming 15 days after the beginning of Greater Cold, Birth of Spring is the first of the 24 solar terms. Birth of Spring also marks the beginning of the plowing season, when the oxen again plow the fields. Yet, since the oxen have remained largely idle all winter, the farmers fear that they may have become lazy. This is the origin of such spring rituals as “welcoming the ox” and “whipping the ox.”

Birth of Spring, fine weather, life force emerging from the earth, all things coming to life. A fine day for planting the seeds of happiness in the field of the mind.

#### Ranghe's Garden

In the western direction there is a hidden world called “Ranghe's Garden.”

It's said that Ranghe's Garden is located in a very subtle spot on the vast plains of Kengeng's Farm; it's only accessible to those who have deep wholesome roots.

Setting out from the east, the Native Youths sail towards the sun. Following the gurgling sound of the streams, they pass through

villages, open fields, and hills, as they make their way deep into the high mountains capped with lofty peaks.

Sailing in their bamboo raft past innumerable mountain chains and primordial forests of vigorous green, they imbibe the pure, brisk air. As they pass through an elegant spruce forest, they come upon a mist-shrouded pond surrounded by sheer cliffs, on top of which stands a luxuriant pine forest.

In the vast silence, they suddenly hear the sound of flowing water coming from below a west-facing cliff. Curious, the Native Youths go down to have a look and discover a cave covered in brambles. After cutting away the brambles they enter the dark cave. Walking a few hundred meters, they suddenly come upon a pristine forest in a bright and vast space.

A splendid scene of mountains and streams unfolds before their eyes. Tall, handsome, luxuriant mountains stretch out into the distance, bathed in the mysterious silver light reflecting off their snow-covered peaks. White clouds wind round the endless verdant ridges appearing like fluttering ribbons of bright jade, imbuing the majestic mountains with an air of sanctity. Undulating slopes lush with towering ancient trees are bordered by elegantly cascading waterfalls. Below the peaks extend fields and gullies, flourishing orchards, bright green grass, all embellished with limpid lakes and streams.

As soon as they step into this marvelous place, the Native Youths feel relaxed and happy, such that the rigors of the journey disappear in one clean sweep. Walking through the verdant forest,

savoring the pure air of this blessed place, they are soon invigorated by the sights and sounds of the various birds and beasts briskly moving about.

“Hey! Is there somebody in the trees up ahead?” says Suvarna, coming to a sudden halt.

The setting sun returns to Ranghe’s Garden;  
That place of profound mystery,  
Now in Kengeng’s Farm,  
Now on Silkworm Island,  
It even appears in the Lebang Pure Land .....

A tender and resonant voice sings out from the trees. With Suvarna in the lead, the Native Youths approach the trees and see two boys collecting plants and surrounded by all sorts of birds and animals, some of which are climbing on their limbs. Surprised by the curious sight, they quickly approach to find out who they are.

“I’m Suvarna, and these are the rest of the Native Youths. We found this place while tracing a stream. May I know who you are and what this place is?”

Frightened by Suvarna’s voice, the birds and beasts scurry into the woods, whereupon the two boys leisurely stand up. One of them, distinguished for his two short ponytails and large, round, clear eyes, says in a resonant voice:

“I’m Padmaprabha and he is the Persistent Calyx Boy. This is

Kengeng's Farm!"

"I didn't know Kengeng's Farm is so big ....." they say.

Kindly disposed towards the cute boys from first sight, Zhenzhu hopefully asks:

"We're looking for the legendary Ranghe's Garden. Do you know where it is?"

Wearing a cloak fashioned out of different types of persistent calyxes, as if he has been expecting their arrival, the red-cheeked Persistent Calyx Boy smilingly says:

"Ranghe's Garden is the most mysterious world in the universe. It's the abode of Ranghe, that youth of perfect purity, consummate wisdom, and miraculous powers. It's only visible to those who have planted deep roots of merit."

"What sort of a person is Ranghe?"

"From your words, you surely know where Ranghe's Garden is!"

"Ah! So you can take us there!" the Native Youths excitedly call out.

"So then, it's all up to me; but you may not be able to find it!" The Native Youths are unable to make heads or tails of the Persistent Calyx Boy's abstruse words. Then Padmaprabha says:

"Actually, Ranghe's Garden is hidden inside Kengeng's Farm. It's an ideal world of extreme subtlety, purity, and happiness. It's the abode of Ranghe, the supreme guide of men. It can only be seen by those who have a karmic affinity. What's more, all over Kengeng's

vast and majestic farm there are veins of rare minerals, but those of little understanding can't find them, much less Ranghe's Garden. So if you are merely curious, then even if it were right under your nose, you still won't find it."

"Do you mean to say that we won't be able to find Ranghe's Garden?" asks Suvarna anxiously.

"Not necessarily! When you become the master of Kengeng's Farm, then you can find it!" says the Persistent Calyx Boy.

"Become the master?" say the Native Youths, puzzled and amazed.

"That's right! Everyone who comes here has the chance to become the master of Kengeng's Farm. All you have to do is attain unfettered freedom and discover the innumerable marvels hidden here; then you can become the master; at the same time, Ranghe's Garden will appear right before your eyes."

Pondering his cryptic words, looking as though she has understood, Zhenzhu asks:

"So, how do we become the unfettered masters of Kengeng's Farm?"

Padmaprabha smiles and nonchalantly says:

"When you personally experience the profound truths of Kengeng's Farm, then you will understand."

After waving goodbye to the two cute boys, eager to find Ranghe's Garden, the Native Youths begin searching up and down for the treasures hidden in this majestic landscape. After some time, they

are surprised to discover Kengeng's Farm has a plethora of medicinal herbs—dwarf sedge, scarlet pimpernel, mugwort, and lilies, to mention a few. Those who can identify them can find them everywhere.

Even more unusual is that every day at sunset, there is heard the faint sound of a drum off in the distance. Every time they hear it, they sense that Ranghe's Garden is nearby, yet they still can't find it.

Today the Native Youths climb down a steep cliff and come to a verdant bamboo forest, whereupon they hear the sound of water rumbling in the distance. Following the sound, they pass through the bamboo forest and come face-to-face with a magnificent waterfall.

Raising their heads, they gaze in wonderment at the towering precipice of multiple stratum rising straight up, at the top of which a silvery spout of water streams forth into space with the force of a thunderbolt. Observing the richly colored rainbow piercing through the mist illuminated by the setting sun, they feel as though they are in a classical landscape painting.

As they are admiring the natural work of art, the familiar sound of the drum again enters their hearts. Then Zhenzhu spontaneously kneels down and piously bows in the direction of the drum sound.

Unexpectedly, a golden light faintly appears in the waterfall.

Search as they may, they can't find the source of the light. Just as they are all beginning to drip with sweat, a refreshingly cool breeze blows out of the bamboo forest, inspiring Rupya to exclaim:

“What a wonderfully refreshing breeze!”

Just then, the silvery waterfall transforms into a curtain of crystal beads. Then it rises up to reveal a huge, splendid doorway in the middle of the cliff.

Thoroughly amazed, the Native Youths wonder how they might make their way in. Just when they are at their wit’s end, the forthright and sincere Suvarna suddenly has an idea. Facing the golden doorway, he piously entreats:

“If we are fortunate enough to enter this doorway, I vow to protect and maintain Kengeng’s Farm life after life, and lead there all those suffering from all sorts of ailments of body or mind, so that they can avail of its bountiful medicinal herbs.”

As if responding to Suvarna’s entreaty, the golden doors open wide, whereupon a wonderful fragrance comes streaming out. Even stranger, the rainbow turns into a bridge leading from the ground up to the golden doorway. One by one the Native Youths happily ascend and pass through the doorway, whereupon the rainbow disappears into the resplendent golden light. Then they are embraced by an extraordinary splendor, making them feel an incomparable sense of ease and tranquility.

After some time, the glorious light fades, and they find themselves in a spotlessly pure garden.

Looking around, they first notice the tall trees soaring strait up into the sky: bodhi trees, ginkgos, pagoda trees, elms, pines, cypresses ..... Their luxuriant leaves give off an extraordinary fragrance and

filter the rays of the sun to create a glimmering coral-like image.

On the forest floor, the scent of the flowers and medicinal plants—ginseng, King Solomon's seal, and glossy ganoderma, to name a few—blends with the fragrance of the ancient trees to create a wonderful aroma which puts the Native Youths at ease. All around, they hear the calls of the rare and wonderful birds that live in the forest—phoenixes, white cranes, peacocks .....

All around are a great diversity of landforms and natural features—mountains, valleys, streams, springs, and lakes. The verdant mountains and lush forests shrouded in mist seem to radiate a riotous profusion of glittering golden light. Most remarkable is the way in which the distant scenery appears to be right in front of their eyes, leaving the Native Youths so dazzled that, if not for Jinlun's keen sense of direction, they would surely lose their way.

As Jinlun uses his impeccable power of observation to skillfully lead the way along the winding tracks and hidden paths, the Native Youths enjoy the scenery to their heart's content.

Pursuing a golden-winged phoenix, when they pass through a grove of green-calyxed plum trees, a wonderful fragrance enters their nostrils and a stand of ancient sal trees appears before their eyes.

On the mottled forest floor, lovely myoga ginger plants gently curve amongst the banana trees. The Native Youths are amazed at the sight of the pure golden color where the bases of the yellow myoga ginger are illuminated by the sunlight obliquely coursing through the

forest canopy.

Suddenly their attention is drawn to an elegant bird call, whereupon they remember that they are still pursuing the phoenix.

Turning around, they are amazed to see that the plum grove has turned into a lapis lazuli pavilion with silver pillars and a golden crown rising up into the swirling mist. As soon as they excitedly enter the pavilion surrounded by pure-white flowers they see the words “Wanhong Pavilion” engraved on a cornelian plaque attached to one of the silver pillars.

Every surface of the Wanhong Pavilion is made of lapis lazuli, as is all the furniture, providing an unobstructed view of the surroundings. Suspended from one of the silver beams, far out of arms reach, is an exquisitely crafted golden drum. Seeing that there is no ladder for climbing up and striking the drum, they look up and curiously scrutinize it for a long while.

After admiring the Wanhong Pavilion to their heart’s content, they discover that the sal grove and myoga ginger have transformed into a pellucid lake full of fragrant lotus flowers of blue, white, purple, gold, and pink. Illuminated by the slanting rays of the setting sun, the upside-down reflection of the snow-capped peaks appears in the lake, the pellucid waters of which are the same color as the clear sky. As they look on in amazement, Zhenzhu declares:

“Oh, I get it! While admiring the wonderful sights here, in addition to going forward, we also have to look back; only then will we fully appreciate all the spectacular scenery .....”

“That’s right! You already understand the secret of Ranghe’s Garden!” Before Zhenzhu can finish, a bright voice rises up from next to the lotus lake.

Looking over, they see a youth with a golden sheen, slim physique, eyes as clear as the limpid sea, white eyebrows, and a graceful, awe-inspiring bearing. With one hand holding a freshly-picked lotus, the other flush against his side, he leisurely walks towards the Wanhong Pavilion.

“Oh! We must already be in Ranghe’s Garden!” say the Native Youths excitedly.

“Friends, welcome to Ranghe’s Garden! I’m Ranghe,” says the waving youth with a melodious voice that puts them all at ease.

“Oh — You are Ranghe!”

“You are Ranghe, the youth with great wisdom and mighty supernormal powers!”

Now sure that they really have found Ranghe, the Native Youths leap with joy, and excitedly gather around him.

“Why is this place called Ranghe’s Garden?” asks Rupya curiously.

“Because in this place there are planted a great number of the most beautiful myoga ginger (ranghe) plants in the entire universe,” says Ranghe in a resonant voice. “The myoga ginger is a very peculiar plant! The red variety has an exquisite taste; the white variety is even more precious, for it’s able to ward off gudu . . . .”

“What’s a gudu?” asks Suvarna.

“A gudu is a type of poisonous insect that gets into your stomach, and then causes all sorts of pain, rather like people’s innate doubts and ignorance which causes them to harm one another.”

As he speaks, he gathers a large amount of foliage from the white myoga ginger plants surrounding the pavilion and places them inside, in the middle of the lapis lazuli floor. Then he tells them that they should lie down on the foliage. Quite pleased with the novel idea, that’s just what they do. Before long, a sort of cool air seems to seep through their skin and a bright, comfortable feeling slowly comes over them.

After a short while, Ranghe calls them to their feet, whereupon they experience a kind of clarity of mind they have never experienced before, making them even more eager to find out more about the wizardly Ranghe.

“Is there a particular reason for situating this pavilion so that it faces west and is illuminated by the setting sun?” asks Zhenzhu, sensing that there is more to know about this structure.

“I’ve always admired the sun setting in the west, because the west is the final destination of all light! Day in and day out, the sun rises in the east, and after shining all day it sets in the west; after resting for the night, on the next morning it again rises in the east. It’s the same with humans; when we are tired, we need to take a rest; after recovering our energy we can set out again with renewed strength and clarity.”

Their interest stirred, they ponder Ranghe’s words for a long

while. Then the vivacious Suvarna points to the golden drum and curiously asks:

“What about that exquisitely crafted drum hanging far out of reach; what’s that for?”

Instead of replying with words, Ranghe simply glances at the Native Youths, smiles, and shows them around the adjacent area.

Before long, just as the sun is sinking low on the western horizon, and the two golden drums—one large, one small—face one another, without being struck, the drum begins to produce an incomparably stately and sublime sound:

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....”

Listening to the sublime sound of the Drum King Dharani, the Native Youths stand perfectly still for a long time and enter into a state of pure concentration and joy.

### **The Spiraling Milky Way —— Yushi’s Secret**

Upon being released from the evil spell, Satana instantly transforms into a young girl, a rather ordinary one at that. Ever since Silkworm Island disappeared, Enguang has been drifting about on the vast sea, anxious about the future, confused about the past .....

Still rocking on the waves, Enguang is awoken by the spindrift splashing on his face and discovers that he is lying on a rudderless boat bobbing up and down. Gazing out in all directions, all he sees is a vast expanse of water. Following the current, the small boat drifts on

and on.

“How is it that I’m drifting on the sea?” wonders Enguang, anxiously murmuring to himself.

Then he slowly begins to recall all that has happened.

“What’s happened to Silkworm Island? And where is Ranghe? What’s happened to Satana?” ponders Enguang. Thinking of his beloved Satana, he is overcome with a heart-wrenching sadness, feeling as if his very soul were being torn to pieces .....

“How have I come to this? Satana — Satana — ” Enguang bitterly calls out to the endless sea.

Ignored by the sky and sea, Enguang is utterly dejected, as tears flow down his exhausted face. As he falls deeper and deeper into despair, he feels as though he is being smothered by some powerful, unseen force. Unable and unwilling to see things through, he resigns himself to aimlessly drifting wherever the current may take him.

Shrouded in a thick mist, on and on the small boat aimlessly drifts.

Once the sun sets and everything is enveloped in darkness, all he can hear is the breathing of the sea and the calls of the sea birds. As he drifts along, a strange conch following the rhythm of the waves floats next to the boat and repeatedly bumps up against Enguang’s hand listlessly hanging in the water. Without thinking, he picks it up and brings it to his ear.

From out of the conch emerges a familiar sound, rather like the sound of the tide, yet similar to the sound of the wooden fish,

sending ripple upon ripple through his apathetic heart.

“Du-du-du .....” Suddenly, without being struck, the small wooden fish he always carries with him begins to make a deep and auspicious sound.

“Du-du-du .....” The continuous sound of the wooden fish wafting across the sea like a warm current enters Enguang’s moribund heart, stirring up a surge of emotion, a flood of tears.

Unable to hold back the sorrow and despair welling up inside, like a child, Enguang bursts into loud sobs. As his tears and choking sobs gradually slacken, the indescribable energy conveyed in the steady sound of the wooden fish slowly soothes his turbulent heart. Utterly exhausted, Enguang enters into a peaceful dream .....

Awakened by the sound of the crashing water, still half asleep, Enguang looks on as the spindrift surges up on all sides and a huge water column lifts the boat out of the water and into the sky. Looking around in terror and bewilderment, he sees a huge, strange fish thrashing about in the center of the water column.

“What? — That’s a makara! What’s this mythological beast of extraordinary power doing here? .....” wonders Enguang, just as the water column breaks up and turns into starlight.

“Eh? The spindrift has turned into the resplendent Milky Way!” Looking confusedly at the sea of stars, Enguang wonders if he is still dreaming.

As if attracted by some invisible force, the boat speeds along through the increasingly dazzling stars and arrives at the center of the

Milky Way. Suddenly Enguang feels a powerful force and sees a huge, bright light approaching. Then there is a flash of bright light, followed by blinding darkness. The rapidly spinning force leaves Enguang in a swoon .....

“Ji — ji — ” The next morning, as the sun is gaining strength and starting to rouse the earth awake, the melodious sound of orioles comes wafting through the curtains embroidered with purple lilies. Then two or three clever orioles fly in and wake Enguang by using their graceful wings to deposit drops of morning dew between his lips. His eyes still closed, he already smells the elegant fragrance of flowers. Persistently urged by the melodious chirps, Enguang strains to open his sleepy eyes.

“Oh my!” calls out Enguang as soon as he opens his eyes and looks out on the golden light in the azure firmament; the lush forest canopy swaying in the sky; flocks of orioles, skylarks, and thrush frolicking in the foliage. The wonderful scene subtly puts Enguang at ease.

Looking over his immediate surroundings, he realizes that he’s inside an elegantly appointed cottage. The rough timber gives off a delicate fragrance; the windows on all sides have curtains embroidered with purple lilies, jasmine, day lilies, and geraniums; and, most remarkably, the ceiling is made of translucent lapis lazuli, affording a full view of the firmament.

Lying on the clean, soft bed, Enguang feels thoroughly

refreshed and invigorated after his long, deep sleep. As the fresh air infused with the fragrance of all sorts of fruits and flowers seeps into his pores, feeling completely relaxed, he makes a long stretch.

“Shwa — ” Enguang’s outstretched hand accidentally presses a switch, whereupon the skylight in the lapis lazuli ceiling opens wide.

In an instant, as the ambience of the natural surroundings fills the room, the agile birds fly down through the opening and alight on Enguang and the bed. Filling his ears with their merry tunes, they playfully tickle his head, chest, and arms, causing him to laugh and sit up.

After playing with the birds for a few moments, Enguang suddenly feels famished. Reaching out through the window, he picks a ripe piece of fruit and happily eats it together with the birds. Having eaten his fill, Enguang cautiously taps the floor with his foot, whereupon the floor cracks open and a pellucid spring comes gushing up. After washing in the water, he drops the remains of the fruit into the crack, whereupon it closes.

The familiar movement stirs up a faint memory, and Enguang begins to wonder:

“Why does this place seem so familiar? Just where am I?”

Randomly pondering on and on, he catches sight of a splendid conch on the bedstead, and then slowly remembers the mysterious makara ..... the bright stars of the Milky Way ..... the darkness ..... and finally Satana. His heart seized by a heavy gloom, his happy mood instantly disappears.

“Alas! What sort of a strange place is this?” Enguang laments.

“Enguang — Hurry up and come out! We can’t keep waiting for you!”

“Yeh! It’s such a lovely spring day; don’t waste it daydreaming inside!” Suddenly hearing merry voices inviting him outside, Enguang curiously gets up and walks out the door.

As soon as he passes through the door he finds himself in a beautiful garden full of orderly rows of colorful flowers blooming in riotous profusion. As his gloomy mood quickly gives way to a sense of vigor, he passes through the rose hedges and sees in the distance several brawny youths waving to him.

Seeing those familiar faces, as resplendent as the rising sun, yet not being able to place them, Enguang stands still and looks on in bewilderment.

“Hurry up, Enguang! Today’s performance is going to be a good one!”

“We’re getting ready to rehearse!”

Then the youths wave again, turn around, and go running off. Having lost his chance to make inquiries, as Enguang rushes to catch up with them, he is amazed to find that he is running very quickly without feeling at all fatigued, as if he were riding the wind!

A number of frisky deer playfully engage Enguang in a race across the grassy fields filled with flowers and assorted birds and beasts, and past lush fruit trees giving off a sweet fragrance. Amongst the trees are a great many cottages in all sorts of strange designs—

some shaped like fish, others like elephants, butterflies, lotus flowers, stars, or the moon, to name a few. The cottages of a similar type are arranged in various villages—some simple and rustic, others elegant and sophisticated, and others novel and clever.

As if competing in beauty, each cottage has its own distinguishing features—some have a decorative grass roof; others are covered by jeweled nets. Yet the different styles complement one another.

Enguang seems to have entered a marvelous kingdom where the novel and familiar meet.

Slowing down his pace, he curiously examines the peculiar cottages interspersed amongst the flowering trees. When he hears the sound of laughter floating on the breeze, he realizes that the youths he just saw must be near. Following the laughter, he swiftly passes through a copse of trees and comes to an expansive open space.

In the open space is a huge bodhi tree. Its robust and mottled trunk is so thick that it would take one hundred people with joined hands to embrace it; its dark shade extends for miles. No one knows for sure how old it is, but it's said that it is as old as the world itself. The people here enjoy sitting in its shade and admiring its gracious bearing, while listening to the melodious sound of the wind rustling its leaves.

Although he wasn't at all feeling hot as he rushed through the cool copse, upon stepping into the shade of the bodhi tree Enguang feels strangely refreshed, whereupon a deep sense of serenity comes

over his body and mind.

Under the bodhi tree are various groups of people, males and females, young and old. Some are sipping tea and playing chess, others are simply chatting; some are singing and dancing, others are putting on a lively theatrical performance ..... Observing the happy scene, a warm current flows through Enguang's heart.

Attracted by the sonorous strains of singing, when Enguang draws near and listens closely, he discovers that the song is about a traveler who endures all manner of hardship before finally returning to his eternal home.

When the stirring song comes to an end, everyone listening is deeply moved, and an exquisite mood comes over Enguang!

Lowering his head and listening closely, the sound of roaring applause enters his ears. Looking up, he sees not far away the group of youths he saw waving to him earlier performing a play on a stage fashioned out of flowers and sweet grass. Enguang walks over and joins the admiring audience in front of the stage.

The play is about a kindhearted person who returns to his lovely hometown to help an old friend, but ends up getting led astray and suffering all sorts of tribulations. As he watches the play, powerful memories come surging up—Luotang Mountain, Silkworm Island, Satana ..... On the stage, the youths wholeheartedly perform; in front of the stage, tears roll down Enguang's face.

As he mulls over the past, the play comes to a sad end, whereupon the youths leave the stage, merrily come over to Enguang,

tap him on the shoulder, and say:

“Let’s go! We’re going to take you to a nice place!”

Before he has a chance to say a word, the youths quickly set out. As he rushes to catch up, Enguang asks:

“This story — ”

Before Enguang can fully articulate his questions, one after another, the youths interject:

“We heard this story from the remote past in a Dharma-talk given by the youth Yushi. Everybody in the audience was so deeply moved by the story that we decided to turn it into a play. Not bad, don’t you think?”

“While putting on the performance, we get so wrapped up in the story that we almost forget to come back to the wonderful and real present. I guess that’s Yushi’s way of reminding us!”

“The youth Yushi?”

“That’s right! The youth Yushi is extremely wise; any time at all he can protect us and dispel our confusion.”

As their words reverberate through Enguang’s mind, his agitation finally begins to subside. Before long, they come to a heavenly lake so broad that the opposite shore is out of sight.

In the lake’s pellucid, blue-tinted waters the verdant mountains and meandering clouds are inversely reflected. On the shore carpeted with soft grass bordered by fragrant flowers lovely children splash in the water with infectiously resonant laughter. On the lake some people leisurely paddle about in small boats, while others swim around in the

refreshingly cool water. The sound of happy laughter fills the air.

Enguang spontaneously plops down on the grass, enjoys a good stretch, and puts away his worries. Suddenly he is startled by the sight of his own reflection in the mirror-like water, whereupon a familiar yet strange feeling fills his heart, the same feeling he has repeatedly felt ever since arriving in this peculiar place. Now feeling this sense of *déjà vu* about himself, he is even more amazed.

Rolling onto his back, he looks into the sky and quietly ponders. Before he knows it, the dark mantle of night is beginning to descend .....

“Enguang, wake up! We’re about to go.”

Briskly rocked out of his sleep, Enguang slowly opens his eyes and sees innumerable stars hanging in the dark sky, whereupon a broad smile ripples out of his heart and onto his face.

“Enguang, let’s take a flight!” Searching around for the source of the sound, Enguang sees the same youths all in high spirits.

“Look! It’s the flying water wheel of the great Dragon King!”

Looking in the direction pointed out by the youths, in the starlight Enguang makes out the graceful lines of a shape something like a vehicle. His curiosity piqued, he jumps up and goes over to have a closer look.

“Fly?” asks Enguang doubtfully.

“That’s right! Every night, as soon as all creatures are fast asleep, the Dragon King flies up into the sky in his flying water wheel

and sprinkles fine dew drops on the earth, settling the dust, moistening the soil, and nourishing all the plants.”

“Amazingly enough, a light sprinkling is all it takes to wash away all the grime! Tonight, as a reward for our excellent performance on stage, the Dragon King has invited us to join him in his sacred work!”

“That’s right! It’s a rare opportunity! Enguang, hop aboard the flying water wheel, before it’s too late; we’re about to take off!”

Looking over the glistening water wheel while listening to the youths words of explanation and encouragement, Enguang is at a loss as to what to make of all this. Noticing his hesitation, the youths say:

“Don’t worry! This flying water wheel was meticulously designed by the Dragon King himself to move in accordance with your thoughts!”

Though still a bit apprehensive, Enguang gives in to their friendly and persistent encouragement and boards the water wheel.

“Let’s go!”

Amid cheers and shouts, one after another the water wheels, each carrying one of the youths, slowly rise into the sky. With each one going in a different direction, they soon disappear on the horizon. Enguang slowly gets a feel for the water wheel he is piloting, and before long is able to pilot it with perfect ease and facility.

Peering down, he sees vast, green forests and fields full of flowers; cloud-capped mountains divided by meandering rivers dotted with cities and towns; green fields full of flourishing grains.

He watches the light rain washing away all the dust from the trees, flowers, grass, and fruits, then turning into glittering dew drops reflecting the resplendent star light. Soon his desultory thoughts subside and a supernatural brightness lights up in his heart.

As he goes along absorbed in the wondrous sights, he is suddenly drawn towards a dazzlingly bright place far off in the distance. Before long he spots a huge, resplendent city surrounded by seven concentric walls made of the seven precious jewels.

All the comely houses in the city are fashioned out of a great variety of precious gems; all the streets are illuminated with pillars made of glowing pearls, each several leagues high.

All of the streets and lanes are completely free of dust; rather, they are spread with gold dust which gives off a magnificent sheen as it reflects the light of the gems and pearls. Throughout the city are lush bodhi trees fashioned out of gems. In each of the innumerable parks and gardens is a pellucid lotus pond filled with lotus flowers giving off a delicate fragrance which puts body and mind at ease.

Enguang directs his water wheel to circle around the tall pillars of glowing pearls, and then down into the parks for a whiff of the lotus flowers. Delighted by the sight of the houses and ramparts washed sparkling clean by the rain, as he swiftly cruises through the sky he catches sight of a resplendent palace at the center of the city and flies over for a closer look.

He soon discovers that the extraordinary palace consists of forty-nine individual palaces. All of the pavilions, railings,

stairways, and window lattices are fashioned out of the incomparably dazzling magic pearls of Brahma. The flying eaves of lapis lazuli are embellished with innumerable gems which give off a delicate ringing sound when stirred by the wind, joining together with the rustling of the bodhi leaves and the gurgling of the spring-fed ponds to create an extraordinary musical sound. As Enguang attentively listens to the exquisite symphony, a corresponding tonality, familiar yet distant, echoes through his heart.

“Du-du-du .....” Suddenly Enguang’s wooden fish begins to sound in perfect time with the music, leaving him astonished.

“This is where the youth Yushi gives his Dharma talks. Really wonderful, don’t you think!” say the youths, suddenly appearing next to Enguang.

“Through the power of his great vows, Yushi is endowed with incomparable patience and benevolence; he’s always looking out for our wellbeing.”

“Moved by his great compassion and breadth of mind, the gods joined together to create this incomparably resplendent palace for Yushi. Every time we come here to listen to his sermons, our bodies and minds are purified by the pure light and miraculous sound. Having entered into such a pure and cheerful state, we are ready to fully imbibe Yushi’s words of wisdom.”

After pondering on the youths’ words for a few moments, as Enguang starts to appreciate just how wonderful this jeweled palace really is, a subtle light of joy ignites in his heart, whereupon he

reciprocates their bright, genial smiles.

Having passed a delightful night cruising about, when the rising sun starts to break through the clouds, Enguang finds himself seated in a flower-bedecked courtyard leisurely soaking up the light of the early morning sun.

“Enguang! It’s a good day for planting; won’t you come and have some fun with us?”

No sooner is he summoned by his companions, than Enguang follows them through the rose hedges and into a wide-open field.

Caressed by the genial rays of the early morning sun, in the field full of all manner of grains and vegetables everyone is busily working, men and women, old and young. Those with more experience show the younger ones how to loosen the soil, sow the seeds, and apply water.

Wielding a hoe, Enguang vigorously works the soil, and before long beads of sweat are dripping from his head. Smelling the scent of the soil and gazing upon the seeds snugly lying on the loosened soil as they wait for the time to sprout, Enguang smiles. Thereupon a regenerative force stirs in his heart, as if preparing to break through some unseen fetters.

When the sun has already risen halfway into the sky and is beginning to blaze in full splendor, everybody puts away their tools and gathers in the shade of the old bodhi tree to drink tea, play chess, play music, sing, and chat. Enguang and the youths dive into the lake;

as they chase the clouds reflected on the rippling surface, they cleanse their bodies and minds in the refreshing water. Becoming tired, they climb onto a bamboo raft, stretch out, and quietly drift about.

“Ding-ding, dong-dong — ” As the sun enters its westward descent, the resonant sound of a bell comes ringing over the horizon, gently rousing Enguang from his reverie.

Marveling at the sound of the bell, an indescribably benevolent feeling rises up in his heart, as if a veil were lifted from the world.

“Oh! The youth Yushi is going to give a Dharma talk!”

“How wonderful!”

“Indeed! I’ve been looking forward to this for many days now!”

Amidst the excited comments, ten thousand brilliant rays of sun burst out on the horizon, instantly dispelling the remaining clouds and dazzling Enguang’s eyes. As soon as his eyes have adjusted to the light, he discovers that he and everybody else are reverently sitting cross-legged in the marvelous palace of forty-nine sections he had seen the night before.

In the highest palace is a stately lion’s throne covered with a high canopy hung with a gauzy veil and decorated with innumerable jewels and flowers. Seated around the throne are one hundred thousand Brahma kings wearing rare and precious bells. Innumerable celestial maidens holding musical instruments and riding auspicious clouds hover in the firmament.

Stirred by a gentle breeze, the sonorous sound of the bells of

the Brahma kings mixes with the jingling of the jewels hanging from the flying eaves to produce a celestial sound which evokes harmonious chirps from the celestial birds assembled from the ten directions. Without being played, all manner of musical instruments begin to make a lilting, heavenly tune, whereupon the celestial maidens perform a song and dance presenting the Ten Wholesome Courses of Action and the Four Great Vows, thereby dispelling the distracting thoughts from everyone's mind.

On the lion throne the stately Yushi sits cross-legged, his eyes closed, as a beam of pure light shines forth from between his eyebrows. Sitting perfectly still, he resembles a majestic mountain of gold, as glorious as the morning sun.

After continuing for what seems like both an eternity and a brief moment, the music comes to a gradual stop, whereupon Yushi slowly opens his pellucid eyes. Exuding an incomparable benevolence, his genial smile coming from deep within his eyes sends an electric-like wave of energy through Enguang's hazy heart.

"Today we are going to visit the Milky Way, so that you can fully experience the profound journey of life," says Yushi in a crystal clear voice as deep as thunder.

No sooner does he finish speaking, than the palace transforms into a gorgeous flying ship soaring into the starry sky.

Buffeted by the heavenly wind, an expansive feeling enters the passengers hearts, as the innumerable stars radiate various hues of

resplendent light—some bluish white, some yellow, others orange-red.

“Ah! So the stars come in so many different colors; how interesting!”

“Actually, just like people, stars go through a process of birth, growth, and death; when the conditions are right they are born, and when the necessary conditions are no longer present, they come to an end. Young stars have a bluish-white color; older ones are yellow; and then they become orange; the oldest stars have a red glow. Finally, they end in a blaze of glory called a supernova,” leisurely explains Yushi.

“Actually, at the end of their lifespan, stars don’t really come to an end, because a supernova contains the energy which will eventually give rise to a new star. That’s why the stars carry on from one generation to the next!”

Like a bell echoing through eternity, Yushi’s voice sets in motion a beautiful wave deep in Enguang’s heart, and he contemplatively looks up at the innumerable stars harmoniously reflecting each other’s glorious splendor.

“The birth of a star is quite a mysterious event. Stars are born amidst the interstellar dust deep inside dark nebulae, which are so dense that even light can’t penetrate them. Such nebulae in which stars are born are called stellar cradles. Look there — ” says Yushi, pointing towards a dark, velvety patch in the sky. “A star is about to be born at the center of that dark nebula! This is a rare opportunity to experience and contemplate how even within the deepest darkness, a light as

brilliant as the sun can be born!”

Taking a close look at the region Yushi is gesturing towards, they make out an especially dark area, as if there were a gaping hole in the middle of a net hung with brilliant jewels.

Gazing into the inky blackness of the dark nebula, Enguang senses a powerful force faintly moving, whereupon the hazy cloud lingering in his heart begins to drift, as if being pulled. Suddenly there is a great noise and a brilliant stream of light comes bursting out from the dark nebula. The dazzling bluish-white and purple-red light illuminates the surrounding star clouds.

Witnessing the birth of a star, a thread of light shoots through Enguang’s heart and slowly dispels that hazy cloud which has been lingering for so long. Then a distant memory slowly appears deep in his heart, filling his eyes with tears.

“Wow! What a huge, bright shooting star!”

“I’ve never seen such an unusual shooting star!”

As Enguang is pondering deeply, the others excitedly call out. Looking up, he sees a brilliant streak of silver shooting through the boundless sea of stars.

“That’s not a shooting star; it’s one of those wind-sails which convey the life of the universe—a comet!” says the smiling Yushi.

“Convey the life of the universe?”

Seeing the perplexity on everybody’s faces, Yushi patiently explains:

“The vast universe is highly diverse and in a state of constant flux. There are countless solar systems, each with its own type of life forms. All these life forms originated from a single pure world. One time many aeons ago, the inhabitants of that world set out in the wind-sail on a pleasure tour, but ended up entranced by the many beautiful things they encountered. As a result, they became trapped in a certain tiny world, and forgot all about their original state of purity. Unable to return to their homeland, they are like castaways on a deserted isle. Afterwards, the beings from that same world have been going out in wind-sails for the purpose of conveying news of their homeland to those castaways, in hopes that they might remember where they came from. Each time they set out, a comet appears in the sky, just like the one we just saw!”

While not especially dazzling against the background of bright stars, the silvery white light speeding past has a mysterious charm about it.

“Only beings of perfect purity can give off such a beautiful, silvery white light while speeding through the galaxy. If their minds are tainted by impurity, then their comet loses its luster, and they fall into a confused and corrupted way of life, from which they are unable to extricate themselves. So, if someday your stock of merit is sufficient, and out of compassion you decide to pilot a lovely wind-sail to other worlds for the purpose of transmitting such news, be sure to always keep your mind free from impurity!”

“Enguang, in Ranghe’s Garden there’s a place which leads to

the Lebang Pure Land. You can go there and Ranghe will teach you the Thirteen Contemplations, which you can use to increase your stock of merit.” Like a vigorous wind, Yushi’s words dispel the larger part of the clouds of bewilderment remaining in Enguang’s heart.

Thereupon, Enguang remembers his past—his purpose for going to Luotang Mountain; how he lost his way and ended up in a terrible predicament; and how Yushi brought him back to the spiraling Milky Way and used all sorts of skillful means to restore his memory. As it turns out, the youths now accompanying him are his dear friends from his hometown!

“Embroided in the long night of birth and death; stranded in the dream of ignorance,” Enguang murmurs.

Having passed through so much tribulation, Enguang’s bright and confident smile finally returns to his face. As he gratefully gazes upon Yushi, he is struck by the way his resplendent eyes seem to transmit a rejuvenating energy.

Thereupon, Enguang firmly decides to return to Luotang Mountain to complete his unfinished mission.

As if responding to Enguang’s resolution, a silvery white light shoots across the heavens. Instantly, he finds himself piloting a wind-sail. With the hearty blessings of all his companions, full of faith and the power of his resolution, he makes his way through the spiraling Milky Way .....

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Enguang arrives at Ranghe's Garden.

Caught up in causes and conditions,  
I suffered the tribulations born of affection;  
May Ranghe please guide me to the place free of sorrow,  
Teach me the contemplation on purity,  
Teach me how to contemplate, teach me how to practice.

Today in Ranghe's Garden the youth Ranghe teaches Enguang the  
Thirteen Contemplations.

### · Contemplation of the Setting Sun

May Enguang settle his mind.

May Enguang understand how he is pulled about by the force  
of karma.

May Enguang understand that the majestic light of Amṛta's  
realm is more brilliant than millions of suns.

On the Spring Equinox and Autumn Equinox the sun rises due  
east and sets due west.

On these two days sit down facing the west and calm your  
mind. When the sun is sinking low in the western sky it looks like a  
drum suspended in space. Contemplate the beautiful setting sun until  
you can clearly see it even when your eyes are closed.

### • Contemplation of Water

Begin by visualizing pure water, then transform it into ice. While visualizing the glistening ice, remember that it is like the lapis lazuli ground of the Pure Land.

The lapis lazuli ground is supported by golden columns adorned with the seven jewels. Each column has eight sides, each embellished with one hundred diamonds. Each diamond emits a thousand beams of light, each of which has eighty-four thousand different colors. Illuminating the lapis lazuli ground, the light is as magnificent as that which would be produced by a thousand kotis of suns.

On the surface of the lapis lazuli ground, golden pathways bordered by the seven jewels intercross like a net of cords.

Each jewel emits a flood of light in five hundred colors and in the shape of flowers, stars, and the moon. Suspended in space, it forms a terrace of light on which rise up a great many storied pavilions. Both sides of the terrace of light are adorned with innumerable banners and musical instruments. When a mild breeze blows over them, the musical instruments begin to play.

### • Contemplation of the Jeweled Ground

Once you have completed the contemplation of water, go back and visualize each object one by one until you can clearly see them whether your eyes are open or closed, even when sleeping. Practicing in this way, you will see the realm of Ganlu.

### • Contemplation of the Jeweled Trees

Contemplation of the jeweled trees means visualizing the trees in Ganlu's realm.

In Ganlu's realm there are seven rows of concentric trees; each tree is eight thousand yojanas tall, with flowers and leaves made of the seven jewels.

Each flower and leaf emits light of gold, red, agate, and green. Coral, amber, and all the other jewels serve as illuminating ornaments.

The trees are covered with splendid nets of pearls. Between the nets are five hundred kotis of palaces, as excellent as those in the Brahma heaven, each inhabited by celestial youths. Each youth wears gems and pearls which have a radiance as brilliant as that of five thousand kotis of suns and moons.

The leaves on each tree are arranged in an orderly manner. Among the leaves are wonderful flowers and fruits made of the seven jewels.

Each leaf is twenty-five yojanas wide, and they interlace to form a pattern like that of Indra's jeweled net. Between the leaves are purple-golden flowers from which grow fruits the size of a jeweled vase.

### • Contemplation of the Ponds

In Ganlu's realm there are ponds formed out of the seven jewels and filled with water possessed of eight excellent qualities.

The water springs from a wish-fulfilling gem, and forms into fourteen streams.

Each stream is the color of the seven jewels, has banks made of gold, and a bed consisting of dazzling diamond sands.

In each stream there are sixty kotis of lotus flowers, each made of the seven jewels, and twelve yojanas in diameter.

As the water flows out of the gem and between the trees and lotus flowers, it makes an exquisite sound.

The wish-fulfilling gem radiates a golden light which transforms into colorful birds with melodious voices.

#### • **Contemplation of the Jeweled Pavilion**

In Ganlu's realm there are five hundred kotis of jeweled pavilions.

In the pavilions dwell innumerable celestial beings playing heavenly music. There are also musical instruments suspended in the sky. With the appearance of heavenly scripture pillars, they play without being struck.

#### • **Contemplation of the Lotus Throne**

In Ganlu's realm there are lotus flowers on the ground made of the seven jewels.

Each lotus petal has the colors of one hundred gems and eighty-four thousand veins issuing eighty-four thousand rays of light. The smallest of these lotuses is two hundred and fifty yojanas wide.

Each lotus has eighty-four thousand petals, between which there are a hundred kotis of wish-fulfilling gems radiating a million beams of light.

On top of the lotus throne are four jeweled columns as tall as a hundred million kotis of Mount Sumerus.

On top of the columns is a canopy adorned with five hundred kotis of excellent gems, just like the one in Yama's heavenly palace. Each gem radiates eighty-four thousand beams of light throughout Ganlu's realm.

#### • Contemplation of the Image

Visualize the image of Ganlu, the color of the gold of the Jambu River, seated on the lotus throne. Then visualize the jeweled ground, ponds, and trees, as well as the jeweled canopies and nets suspended in the sky.

Next, visualize two lotuses, one to the left of Ganlu, and one to the right. Seated on the lotus to the left is Zhiyue; seated on the lotus to the right is Kengeng. They both radiate a light which entirely pervades Ganlu's realm.

#### • Contemplation of Ganlu

Visualize the youth Ganlu, endowed with all the major and minor distinguishing marks, and radiating a light twice as bright as all the excellent gold in one hundred million kotis of Yama Heavens.

Between his eyebrows is a white tuft of hair turning to the

right, as large as Mount Sumeru. His eyes are as pellucid as the water of the ocean.

Ganlu is endowed with eighty-four thousand auspicious marks. Each mark has eighty-four thousand secondary marks, each one emitting eighty-four thousand beams of light which illuminate all the worlds of the ten directions, drawing all sentient beings towards Ganlu's realm.

• **Contemplation of Guanyin**

The flanking attendant to the left of Ganlu, Zhiyue, has a sheen the color of polished gold with a purple tinge.

On the top of her head is a fleshy protuberance. She wears a celestial crown and eighty kotis of radiant necklaces. In her hand are five hundred kotis of lotus flowers in various colors. On the tips of each of her fingers are eighty-four thousand stately images.

Each image consists of eighty-four thousand different colors, each emitting eighty-four thousand rays of light which illuminate all sentient beings.

• **Contemplation of Mahasthamaprapta**

The flanking attendant to the right of Ganlu, Kengeng, also has a sheen the color of polished gold with a purple tinge. On the top of his head is a fleshy protuberance with the appearance of a red lotus flower, which is surmounted by a jeweled vase radiating innumerable rays of light. When Kengeng walks, a tremor shakes all the worlds

in the ten directions. Wherever the earth trembles, there appear five hundred kotis of jeweled flowers. Whenever he sits, a tremor shakes the seven-jeweled land.

### **• Contemplation of One's Universal Body After Rebirth in the Pure Land**

Visualize yourself being miraculously reborn inside a closed lotus in Ganlu's realm.

Then visualize the lotus opening, whereupon lights in five hundred different colors illuminate your body.

Next, visualize opening your eyes and seeing Ganlu, Zhiyue, and Kengeng filling the sky. Then imagine hearing the wonderful sound of the water, birds, and trees. After rising from meditation you should remember all this.

### **• Contemplation of Various Concepts**

Ganlu freely manifests all the realms of the ten directions, sometimes with a small body, sometimes with a large body, all for the benefit of all sentient beings.

As Ganlu goes about benefiting sentient beings, he is accompanied by Zhiyue and Kengeng, as well as Ranghe.

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“Ding-ding, dong-dong — ” Illuminated by the sun, the myoga ginger in Ranghe’s Garden begins to make the brilliant sound of the Dharma. Its body glowing a light shade of gold, the Suanni excitedly traipses amongst the myoga ginger plants of red, white, and yellow.

Next to the huge lotus pond, Enguang kneels down and chants:

I take refuge in the inconceivable storehouse of brilliance,  
Developing Ganlu,  
Realizing the deathless,  
Coursing in the peace of Ganlu.  
Ganlu’s realm, great bliss,  
Ganlu develops, Ganlu is born, Ganlu remains,  
Ganlu is realization, Ganlu is light,  
Ganlu is miraculous transformation, Ganlu is the deathless.  
Ganlu soars, Ganlu sings,  
Ganlu is freely omnipotent, Ganlu plants seeds,  
Ganlu brings all things to fruition,  
Ganlu destroys the defilements,  
Jushe — jushena —  
Jiedi zheboli suopohe.

## Ganlu's Garden

“Amṛta — ” At dusk, as the sun drops down like a golden drum, the familiar sound of the Drum King Dharani again fills the Wanhong Pavilion. Instead of leading everybody in contemplating the setting sun, Ranghe simply sits cross-legged in the pavilion with his eyes downturned and radiates a soft, joyous, stately light. Just as everyone begins to take notice, Ranghe emits a brilliant golden light from between his eyebrows, instantly illuminating Ranghe's Garden in its entirety.

Seeing the golden light, each of the Native Youths experience a serenity of body and mind so remarkable that they spontaneously close their eyes and concentrate so deeply on the extraordinary peace that they gradually forget the passage of time and where they are .....

Buffeted by a strong wind, the Native Youths slowly open their eyes and discover that together with the others they are riding a golden light, coursing through a resplendent sea of stars, whipping along as fast as wind and lightning towards a brilliant cluster of stars on the boundless horizon. Before they have a chance to be startled, they have reached their destination. They sense that the light contains an inconceivable energy which wafts over them and imparts a profound sense of joy and peace.

“We have arrived at Ganlu's Garden, a vast place of wondrous purity,” announces Ranghe, instantly ushering them out of their sweet dream and into a wonderful state of amazement!

Looking around, they see an extraordinary world of magnificent beauty and pure splendor. Everything seems to have a light golden sheen, and as they float about in space they are all covered in a subtle golden light. With each gentle breeze, they smell an incredibly sweet and subtle fragrance which transports them into a state of profound bliss.

“When the sun rises, the Lotus Treasury appears in the east; when it sets, it returns to the Happy Land in the west. Ganlu’s Garden is the repository of all the light of the setting sun; it’s also the ultimate goal of all sentient beings in the entire universe.

“Ganlu’s Garden is a place of inconceivable joy, but it’s only open to those with wholesome roots and a bountiful stock of merit. The people here continually listen to the profound Dharma; even while listening to the wonderful music, they are bringing their virtue to perfection! The secret treasures of this place are waiting for you to discover them.”

Listening to Ranghe’s description of his Garden, the Native Youths are overcome with curiosity and eager to explore every part of it.

While Ranghe is explaining, they travel thousands of leagues.

Suddenly there appears before their eyes a boundless, verdant sea of towering trees neatly arranged in seven concentric rows—sal, sandalwood, bilva, bodhi, ginkgo, conifer, and bamboo. From the tops of the trees there shoots out a boundlessly resplendent golden light, so

bright that they can't look directly at it.

“Such a surpassingly excellent sight is exceedingly rare. Let's go down for a closer look!” says Zhenzhu before flying down into the forest.

Entering the forest, he sees that the ground is covered with gold. Set off by the golden light above, the majestic trees flowering with the seven gems take on increased splendor. Stirred by the gentle wind, the foliage produces a marvelous sound which imparts a sense of tranquility and joy to all who hear it.

Within the forest there is a deep pool filled with water as clear as a bright mirror of lapis lazuli. The bottom of the pool is spread with gold dust. Growing in the pool are golden, white, blue, and red lotus flowers with a magnificent luster and a superb scent. The pool is surrounded by sandalwood and bilva trees, the dense leaves of which float about on the surface. The bowers laden with flowers and fruits produce a delicate fragrance which mixes with that of the lotus flowers and is carried by the wind far and wide.

Gazing on the extraordinarily majestic scene, the Native Youths realize that the pool is the source of the wonderful, serenity-inducing scent, and spontaneously break into words of praise.

“Ah! What a marvelously fragrant pool! Let's have a drink!”

“Wow! Let's take a refreshing dip in this heavenly water!”

No sooner do they give voice to their thoughts, than they feel as though they've already had a dip and quenched their thirst. Feeling thoroughly refreshed and relaxed, with a delectable taste still lingering

in their mouths, they are even more amazed and eager to explore this extraordinary place.

The deep-gold pool is so wide that it can't be taken in in a single glance. Everything looks glossy and fresh. Countless meandering streams flow out of the pool and into the forest. Carried by the gently rippling water, the bright and beautiful lotuses drift about and spread their pure fragrance all over. The purling water produces a hundred thousand different wonderful sounds, all as sonorous as the celestial music of the Brahma heaven.

"Incredible! This mirror-like fragrant pool also makes celestial music!"

"Indeed! What's more, these countless streams are constantly flowing out of the pool, yet the level of the pool never changes."

"Look! I've found out why!"

Shouting out as if he's found some rare treasure, Suvarna calls the others over to have a look at a spring gushing out from below a clump of golden lotuses.

"Oh — The water in this pool is constantly circulating! That's how it nourishes all these lovely plants," says Zhenzhu excitedly.

With Ranghe leading the way, draped in golden light, the Native Youths fly up into the air and follow one of the streams flowing through the forest.

From time to time they hear various sounds—the crisp, bell-like sound of the bamboo trees swaying in the wind; the mesmerizing sound of the swaying bodhi trees; the resonant, wave-like sound

of the wind passing through the luxuriant sal trees. Accompanied by the wondrous array of celestial sounds, they follow the stream downstream.

Despite the dense foliage on both banks, the forest floor is flooded with sunlight. As pure as lapis lazuli, the ground is sprinkled with dark spots which look like sapphires and emeralds. Whenever the wind blows there appears a wondrous display of light and shadow.

As they are admiring the amazing sights, Zhenzhu suddenly exclaims:

“Look! Those jewel trees are radiating a strange light.”

Looking over, they see the trunks of countless jewel trees emitting millions of rays of glittering, interweaving light. As they look on, innumerable bright mirrors appear in between the trees, each one reflecting one of the stately pure lands in the Great Chiliocosm. The images are so complete and detailed that the Native Youths feel as if they have gone there in person.

Gazing at the wondrous spectacle, they are so overcome with amazement that they forget themselves! In a brief moment they feel as though they have just visited countless different realms.

Still marveling at the experience, they follow Ranghe out of the forest and see a whole new amazing scene.

Dropping low on the boundless horizon, the setting sun casts out a flood of resplendent rays onto the broad, level ground, as pure as lapis lazuli.

As far as the eye can see, the land is covered with cultivated

fields arranged in an orderly pattern, all aglow with the resplendent golden-red color of the setting sun. In between the fields are seven rows of trees with glossy leaves radiating a brilliant golden light. Looking down from above, the fields look just like a patchwork monastic robe gracefully fluttering in the refreshing breeze.

“The character-suiting fields are the most extraordinary sight in Ganlu’s Garden! Every day the refulgent rays of the setting sun illuminating the fields produce this amazing image of a golden-red robe,” Ranghe leisurely explains.

“Character-suiting fields? What’s that?” ask the puzzled Native Youths.

“As a way of benefitting all sentient beings, Ganlu opened up innumerable fields and planted them with a great variety of plants, all in accordance with the various characters and proclivities of sentient beings. This is the meaning of ‘character-suiting fields’!”

Although the Native Youths nod in agreement, Zhenzhu still has a question:

“But how does one establish differing fields of merit to suit the differing characters of sentient beings?”

“There are nine different environments in Ganlu’s Garden, and those who come here dwell in whichever one suits their particular proclivities and requirements. Today you have already visited several rare and wonderful places; tomorrow at daybreak I’ll show you some more.

The next morning, just as the sun is stretching out its golden arms, everyone is brimming with energy, and Ranghe leads them on a low flight along a meandering stream.

Looking down, they see orderly fields filled with grain; orchards overflowing with peaches, plums, prunes, and jujubes; and all manner of medicinal herbs. The fields are watered by the pellucid streams flowing on their peripheries. In between the fields are seven rows of trees which block the wind and sun whenever needed, now and then making a wonderful sound, as a result of which the crops flourish.

Embellished with early morning dew, the vast, verdant fields have an especially stately appearance.

Draped in golden light, the Native Youths playfully fly about the sky over the endless fields. Suddenly they catch sight of a resplendent city surrounded by tall rows of jeweled trees and radiating a multitude of colorful lights.

“Look! It’s a huge city! With all those colors pouring out, it may well be full of hidden treasure. Let’s go and find out!”

The ever-changing Ganlu’s Garden is chock full of miraculous sights. As soon as they conceive the intention, they find themselves in the middle of the city.

Inside the magnificent city, grand palaces and impressive pavilions rise up all over. The golden columns are embellished with four types of gems; the railings are adorned with the seven jewels, the colors of which are incomparably brilliant.

All of the pavilions are made of gold, pearls, and precious stones. Some are made of one type of material, others are mixed. Apart from their elegant style, what's most remarkable is that they are so skilfully crafted that no cracks or seams are anywhere to be seen.

The city is full of cloud-like banners and strings of pearls with the look of rain. The pavilions are hung with jeweled nets which emit innumerable rays of colored light. Stirred by the wind, the jewels give off a euphonious sound.

The Native Youths roam about, now mounting the pavilions, now flying between the jeweled nets. As they admire the ingeniously and delicately wrought jewels, they spontaneously appear hanging on their ears, necks, wrists, and waists.

After they have visited the entire city, a wonderful sound lightly rises up. Listening closely, they hear a voice carried on the wind:

.....Ganlu develops, Ganlu is born,  
Ganlu remains, Ganlu is realization,  
Ganlu is light, Ganlu is miraculous transformation,  
Ganlu soars, Ganlu sings,  
Ganlu is freely omnipotent, Ganlu plants seeds .....

Then they discover that what they are hearing is the sound of the lush jewel trees being stirred by the wind.

That magnificent city is thronged with people, some in the

streets, some in the palaces, some under the bodhi trees, others in the air amongst the jeweled nets and banners. Some are leisurely walking around enjoying the sights, some are sitting in meditation, others are chanting scriptures. Some are deep in contemplation, others are practicing mindfulness of the Buddha. All have a highly dignified and serene countenance and are wearing splendid costumes and adornments.

As the Native Youths go about amongst them, even without saying a word, they feel like they fit right in, as if there is a complete meeting of minds.

After going about for some time admiring the countless marvelous sights, the Native Youths suddenly see in the distance a large group of people seated around a huge bodhi tree. Drawing near for a closer look, they are surprised to see Kengeng and Zhiyue giving a talk:

“..... Only those with strong wholesome roots and an abundance of merit can be reborn in the Land of Bliss. Wholesome roots are the ultimate source of wisdom. Ganlu’s Garden is the further shore, the deathless; it’s the inconceivable state of eternal life .....

“Zhiyue, Kengeng! What are you doing here?”

Not at all surprised by the arrival of the Native Youths, Kengeng simply nods and smiles while Zhiyue leisurely says:

“Kengeng’s Farm is none other than Ganlu’s Garden; Ganlu’s Garden is our native place. Ganlu has sent Kengeng and I to Kengeng’s Farm to rescue sentient beings. We regularly come here and

teach people about the past vows of the kingly Ganlu.”

“The past vows of the kingly Ganlu?”

“That’s right! How is it that everything is so marvelous, stately, and pure? How is it that you are able to miraculously go about this vast realm without the slightest obstruction? It’s all the result of the power of the kingly Ganlu’s original vows.”

Seeing the somewhat puzzled expressions on the Native Youths’ faces, Zhiyue explains in more detail:

“Ganlu has boundless compassion and sympathy for all sentient beings. In the distant past he vowed to use his wisdom and all manner of skillful means to benefit all sentient beings, and purify their six senses. As a result, he has succeeded in establishing this wonderful realm. Due to the power of his vows, whoever wholeheartedly repeats his name receives an immediate response.

Listening intently, Zhenzhu insightfully asks:

“How is it that the power of Ganlu’s vows has brought about such inconceivable results?”

Zhiyue smilingly answers:

“Just now we were explaining this very topic to this group of friends. Why don’t you join them.”

The Native Youths quickly sit down, whereupon Zhiyue surveys the audience before continuing:

“Put simply, Ganlu’s vows have their effect by making use of ‘other-power.’ This can be illustrated with various similes —

Suppose there are one hundred strong men who pile up

firewood day after day for one hundred years. The pile will be as high as a mountain, but if it catches fire, then in no time at all it will be reduced to a heap of cinders. In the same way, the King of Flaming Brightness is capable of instantly removing the karmic force of ignorance which sentient beings have been accumulating for countless lifetimes.

Again, suppose a boat loaded with passengers and goods is slowly sailing in the windless sea. Then there begins to blow a wind so powerful that it sails a thousand leagues in a single day.

Again, suppose there is a very poor man who has to work very hard day after day just to eke out a living. Then one day he happens to suddenly come into possession of a great treasure.

Again, suppose there is a large group of strong men trying with all their might to pull a thick vine down from a tree, but the vine doesn't budge. Then a seven-year-old boy comes along with a sharp sword and uses it to bring the vine down with one swift chop.

Again, suppose there is a pond full of fish and clams. Then a poison-feathered zhen bird accidentally falls into the water, poisoning it such that the fish and clams are on the brink of death. As luck would have it, a thirsty rhinoceros comes to the pond for a drink. Since its horn has the power to neutralize poison, as soon as its horn touches the water, the poison loses its effect and the fish and clams are saved .....

Listening to Zhiyue's series of similes, everybody sitting under the bodhi tree suddenly gains deep insight into the power of Ganlu's vows. This is especially so for the Native Youths, who are full

of praise.

After remaining for some time under the bodhi tree and asking Zhiyue and Kengeng for advice, the Native Youths decide to continue their tour. But as they are waving goodbye, they suddenly realize that ever since they came to this city they haven't seen Ranghe anywhere.

Feeling a bit uneasy about exploring further without Ranghe's guidance, they decide to go looking for him. No sooner does the thought occur to them, than Ranghe appears right in front of them, as though summoned by their thoughts. Ranghe smilingly says:

"It seems that from Zhiyue and Kengeng you have learned much about the inconceivable power of wisdom and vows! Now I'll take you to visit an even more remarkable place!"

Then the Native Youths finally realize that Ranghe has been with them all along, but that they were enjoying the tour so much that they had forgotten all about him.

Happily following Ranghe, before long they smell the scent of a great variety of flowers; then the sight of field upon field full of thriving flowers fills their eyes.

Chinese bellflowers, lilies, lotuses, orchids, chrysanthemums, violets ..... golden-yellow, pure-white, bright-red, light-purple ..... delicate and graceful flowers of all description give off their fragrance. Unable to hold themselves back, the Native Youths plunge into the flower-filled fields and bathe their bodies and minds in the exquisite fragrance. Afterwards, just as dusk is approaching, Ranghe leads them into an elegant forest of verdant bamboos.

As soon as they enter the pristine bamboo forest, the harmonious buzz of cicadas enters their ears. Spontaneously slowing down to listen more closely to the poetic cadence, they make their way towards the center of the forest.

Suddenly a silver chime rings three times in the distance.

Then the flawless sound seems to transform into a silvery dragon which soars up into the deep blue sky and shakes the boundless firmament, as if echoing the sound lingering in the forest. The Native Youths are deeply moved by the wonderful sound.

Looking around for the chime, they discover a simple but stately temple.

Just then the slanting rays of the setting sun are entering the main hall and falling upon a glittering silver chime which, without being struck, produces the most exquisite sound in the entire universe—the Ring of the Sky-Shaking Chime.

After some time they hear the sound of moving water. Looking behind the main hall, they discover a natural spring flowing out of the side of a cliff. As the limpid water falls onto a jade slab, it produces a most superb sound—reminiscent of the lilting strains of the *qi*, *se*, and *konghou*—which enters deeply into their hearts.

Listening to the sound, the Native Youths experience a sense of profound peace and joy. Thereupon they follow Ranghe into the main hall, sit down cross-legged, and pass the night listening to the sound of the cicadas, the chime, and the spring. As they focus on the ethereal sound in three registers, an incomparably pure state of joy

enters their hearts.

“Having had an entire night of profound spiritual experience, I can see from the sheen of wisdom in your eyes that you are ready to appreciate some of the even subtler aspects of Ganlu’s Garden. Now I’m going to take you to visit Ganlu himself.”

Hearing that they are going to visit Ganlu, they are filled with joy and expectation.

Carried up by the golden light, they leave the bamboo forest, and soon see up ahead field upon bright field of thriving bodhi saplings.

As they approach, their eyes are filled with countless bodhi saplings, vivid green with a touch of red, wavering in the golden light of the early morning sun. A spring-fed stream of pellucid water bordering the nursery nurtures and protects the saplings. Gazing upon the thriving yet delicate saplings, their hearts are filled with youthful expectation.

Following the stream, they enter a broad, serene forest of bodhi trees.

Illuminated by the rising sun, the drops of dew hanging off the foliage shimmer like pearls and radiate innumerable rays of brilliant light throughout the forest. Tinged with the golden light, the gauzy clouds and thin mist gracefully floating about give the luxuriant forest an ethereal ambience. Surpassing the splendor of the heavenly bodies, as the subtle light shines upon the Native Youths, they feel purified in

body and mind.

Swaying in the gentle wind, the leaves produce an incomparably euphonious sound. Up ahead there appears a resplendent golden light, imbuing the Native Youths with a sense of spiritual joy. Suddenly a pure and gentle voice fills the forest:

“Native Youths, welcome to Ganlu’s Garden!”

Looking around, they see a youth with a golden sheen and a highly dignified countenance, and realize that the resplendent golden light is coming from his body. As they all look on in amazement, Zhenzhu suddenly says:

“Wow — It’s the Golden Youth! You are Ganlu, the perfectly enlightened one of infinite light!”

Now realizing that they have finally come face-to-face with the quintessentially pure and august Ganlu, overjoyed, the Native Youths break into spontaneous cheers.

Endowed with unlimited wisdom, spiritual power, and all the marks of a great sage, Ganlu has a kind and affable countenance which puts the Native Youths completely at ease. Gathering around the genial Ganlu, after they tell him all about their experience, Ganlu smilingly nods and says:

“A special banquet has been prepared so that on this wonderfully fresh morning you can deepen your appreciation of Truth and Reality!”

As if summoned by Ganlu’s words, a fragrant breeze blows through the trees, its delicate scent filling space and dispelling all

worldly thoughts from their minds. Floating in on the breeze, countless flowers emitting every imaginable hue of light drop to the ground in order of their color, covering the golden ground with a network as soft as silk floss.

Overcome with curiosity, when the Native Youths step onto the carpet of flowers, it sinks down and then springs back up. As soon as they sit down and think of the dishes they would like to eat, that very same food appears in bowls of gold, silver, etc. And without even moving their hands or opening their mouths, they taste the food and their hunger is satisfied.

As they enjoy the food, rustled by the fragrant wind, the leaves on the bodhi trees dance about and produce celestial sounds reminiscent of a virtuoso plucking a konghou, or a network of jangling jewels. Then there is the splendid sound of countless birds—kalavinkas, birds-of-paradise, phoenixes, white cranes, peacocks, etc. The pure tones of the wind, trees, and birds combine to create a natural symphony which sounds just like the resonant chanting of scriptures.

As soon as their hunger is satisfied, the fragrant wind again blows in, sweeping away all the bowls and flowers, leaving the ground spotlessly clean.

Deeply satisfied by the sumptuous meal accompanied by celestial sights, sounds, and fragrances, the Native Youths feel refreshed in body and mind, and have a subtle realization:

“By fully understanding food and sleep, one learns that the distinctive mark of truth resides in the heart!”



On the Vernal Equinox the sun rises due east, and sets due west. As the sun sets on this day it has the appearance of a golden drum hanging on the horizon. At this time sit down facing west and calm the mind while observing the sunset. Continue observing until the golden drum becomes clearly visible even when your eyes are closed. In this way one generates boundless merit.

On a spring day at dusk, on the edge of a rainforest, an angelic young girl transplants rice seedlings. For the past seven days, the same twilight, the same field, the same focus, the same recollection. Today is the Vernal Equinox; the girl sits down facing west and settles her mind. Just now, the sun is setting due west .....

Appearing like a golden drum suspended in the sky, the sun dips low on the glowing horizon. Stirred by a gentle wind, as the seven rows of trees produce countless wonderful sounds, the girl hears the solemn strains of the Drum King Dharani:

In the west, passing beyond a hundred thousand kotis of galaxies,

There is a world called the Lebang Pure Land,

Where Ganlu — Amṛta — is now teaching the Dharma .....

Seated inside the golden drum is that great guide — Ganlu.

Possessed of the marks of a great sage, unsurpassed in splendor and beauty, Ganlu suddenly appears before Satana.

When Satana faces east, Ganlu appears in the east;

When Satana faces west, Ganlu appears in the west;

When Satana faces south, Ganlu appears in the south;

When Satana faces north, Ganlu appears in the north;

When Satana looks at her ten fingers, Ganlu appears on each fingertip.

\*

Tonight Satana dreams about a golden drum, very large, radiating a light as bright as the sun. Inside the light are innumerable images of Ganlu sitting on the lapis lazuli ground below a jewel tree, teaching the Dharma to a great mass of people. Then she sees a person beating a drum which loudly produces the verses on repentance. When she wakes up she deeply reflects on what she heard in the dream, reciting the verses on repentance all the way until sunrise .....

Last night, a dream of a splendid golden drum,

Surpassing the sun in brilliance, illuminating all the worlds in the ten directions.

Beaten with a stick, the sound of the golden drum reverberates throughout the universe,

Wonderful, subtle, and pure, turning the wheel of the Dharma.

In whosoever hears the golden drum is born awareness,  
mindfulness, awakening.

Amṛta Amṛta Amṛta Amṛta  
Seven rows of wonderful trees warding off the eight winds,  
Eight spring-fed pools irrigating the land.  
Ganlu's Dharma hall, by night filled with song,  
By day sowing the seeds of wisdom.



On the Autumn Equinox the sun rises due east, and sets due west. As the sun sets on this day it has the appearance of a golden drum hanging on the horizon. At this time sit down facing west and calm the mind while observing the sunset. Continue observing until the golden drum becomes clearly visible even when your eyes are closed. In this way one generates boundless merit.

On an autumn day at dusk, leaves falling down, an angelic young girl transplants rice seedlings. For the past seven days, the same twilight, the same field, the same focus, the same recollection. Today is the Autumn Equinox; the girl sits down facing west and settles her mind. Just now the sun is setting due west .....

Appearing like a golden drum suspended in the sky, the sun

dips low on the glowing horizon. Resembling the character-suiting fields, the vast expanse of rice fields forms a resplendent sea of golden yellow. Stirred by a gentle wind, the golden-yellow tassels on the rice stalks produce countless wonderful sounds. The girl hears the solemn strains of the Drum King Dharani:

In the west, passing beyond a hundred thousand kotis of buddha realms,

There is a world called Sukhavati with a buddha,

By the name of Amitabha, who is now teaching the Dharma.

Amṛta, Amṛta, Amṛta .....

Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitabha .....



## ***Characters***

**Enguang:** Sincere and upright by nature, after the youthful Enguang becomes infatuated with Satana, he leaves his ancestral home on pristine Luotang Mountain and ends up getting caught up in worldly affairs.

Enguang represents “discriminating cognition.” While still on Luotang Mountain he is like an angel come down to earth; like an innocent child, he is free of afflicted emotions. But when he goes to Silkworm Island he becomes captivated by the Beguiling Song of the Five Aggregates and the Kapila Incantation.

**Satana:** The mistress of Silkworm Island.

Satana represents the store consciousness (*alaya vijñana*). The place she has created through the process of dependent arising and pervasive discrimination represents the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, conditioning, consciousness).

She is the chief architect of Silkworm Island, a place for molding one’s character and taming one’s afflicted emotions.

**Asuluo:** The pure-minded Asuluo is Satana’s loyal assistant.

Representing the aggregate of consciousness, she engages in false discrimination of sensory data, and thus illustrates how our circumstances in life are created through our own misapprehension of reality.

**Yanbo:** Yanbo represents the aggregate of form. Deeply attached to material objects, she is unable to understand the true nature of things, as a result of which she lives in a fantasy world of her own making.

**Yunxing:** The handsome, talented, and youthful Yunxing is highly confident and eloquent. He represents the aggregate of feeling. Because he is constantly clamoring to take possession of imaginary objects, he can't see who their real owner is.

**Chenwai:** The highly cultured Chenwai is fond of using his clever mind to make detailed observations. Using his strong power of imagination, he created his "cocoon room" and then ensconced himself inside.

Chenwai represents the aggregate of perception. Due to his distorted perceptions of reality, he gets fooled by a mirage.

**Wulu:** The beautiful and passionate Wulu is highly jealous of Chenwai, her sweetheart. Yet, she is even more jealous of Satana's great wealth, for the sake of which she would be willing to betray Chenwai.

Wulu represents the aggregate of conditioning.

**Ayou:** Ayou is one of the four shamanesses who look after Satana's health. Her specialty is nutrition, and she is highly particular about cultivating physical vigor. She is fond of diving for pearls at the break of day.

**Shuye:** Shuye is the young shamaness who specializes in prayer, for which purpose she likes to stay deep in the mountains.

She keeps her hair tied in an exquisite bun. Although highly rational and dispassionate, Shuye is attached to worshipping such natural phenomena as ancient trees, huge boulders, and towering waterfalls.

**Pomo:** Pomo is the shamaness who specializes in divination and astrology, for which purpose she likes to stay in lonely places.

With almond-shaped eyes and the pure air of a celestial being, Pomo is sharp minded yet reticent. She is fond of places endowed with exceptional spiritual energy, and always has her divination bones at her side.

**Adapo:** Adapo is the shamaness who specializes in herbal medicine, for which purpose she makes trips deep into the wilderness to find rare herbs. She also uses such substances as pot black and the dew which accumulates on rotting wood to create all manner of pills and powders for Satana.

**Zhiyue:** Zhiyue is a quintessentially graceful maiden brimming with the brilliant light of wisdom.

After a denizen of Lebang disappears, she is sent to the human world to find that person.

**Kengeng:** Kengeng is the epitome of goodness. A vigorous yet stately youth, he has an extraordinary purity and strength of mind. His abode

is called Kengeng's Farm, where he sows the seeds of wisdom. He has a suanni, a mythical lion, as his loyal companion.

**Lord of the Five Aggregates:** One's internal master. If the master goes astray, then the guest is misled or neglected.

**The Native Youths:** A group of high-minded youths in search of the true appearance of life, including Rupya, Zhenzhu, Suvana, and Youxi Jinlun. Riding their wind-sails, the adventurous Native Youths set out on a miraculous journey to the ends of the universe. They represent purity and aloofness from worldly constraints.

**Master Bianzhao:** An enlightened master who traverses the universe to share his wisdom with others, especially Ganlu.

**The Perpetual Calyx Boy:** A disciple of Master Bianzhao, he goes about with a fresh blade of grass dripping with dew.

**Yushi:** A disciple of the Golden Youth, he lives in the Snow Mountains. After he loses his way and gets entangled in the net of attachment cast out by the Kapila Incantation, Zhiyue rescues him and brings him back to the Snow Mountains. Afterwards, he practices austerities in the swirling Milky Way, in the course of which he gains much wisdom, compassion, and perseverance.

**The Benevolent King:** A head of state who is a disciple of the Golden Youth.

**Padmaprabha:** A boy disciple of the Golden Youth, the genial Padmaprabha lives in the Lotus City of the Lotus Treasury world. Despite his young age, he has a highly developed sense of synesthesia.

**Ranghe:** The real master of Kengeng's Farm.  
Like a lotus remaining pure as it rises from the mud, he guides people to the Pure Land.

**Ganlu:** The epitome of bliss.  
Ganlu is the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term Amṛta. Having discovered Truth, Ganlu helps others to do the same, for which purpose he has established a wonderful realm with rows of jewel trees full of flowers, birds, and music, all of which continually provide spiritual guidance.  
Ganlu is Satana's eternal, true refuge.



## *The Call of Life*

On a summer night the glittering stars wink, as if they have a story to tell. In this dusty world of ours, whenever a gust of wind blows or a drop of water falls, there is a touching story to tell. Like so many falling leaves and whirling flowers, or frogs croaking in the moonlight, all these stories have been recorded on palm leaf manuscripts kept in the realm of dust. All we have to do is diligently seek them out!

In the refreshing air of spring, the earth embraces me; pursuing red blossoms fallen from the stem, the earth forsakes me; when the fruit is nearly ripe, the earth calls out to me. One can never leave the fragrance of the earth. On a moonlit night in early autumn a cool breeze blows, echoing an ancient loneliness in the human heart. In the golden rays of the setting autumn sun, the white canna on the slopes miraculously becomes transparent; even the waist-high weeds take on a lovely hue.

A long, soft light —

Drinking the frigid north wind leaves people disappointed and perplexed. Life is full of suffering; yet we have to happily face it. Thus we need to sing in praise of the grand and awe-inspiring essential nature of the universe. We need to strive for purity and well-being, for ourselves and all beings. In the words of Leo Tolstoy, “Human life is

characterized by certain limitations. Like the fruit on the branch, it has a beginning, and an end. A wise person happily accepts this natural order of things.”

Faith is the highest form of love.

In this day and age there is a lack of lofty sentiments and high aspirations, such that people are rarely moved by the pageant of life. Ultimately, we lose sight of the sublime grandeur of the mountains and rivers; we no longer marvel at the bright sky. But when we really encounter life—a laughing baby; a nursing lambkin; an opening flower; a snout-nosed urchin traipsing between the fields; a mitten crab rushing about in a winter valley—great compassion is born! Only with a mind imbued with compassion is it possible to see the essential goodness of all sentient beings and hear the sound of life. Only with a good heart is it possible to respond to primordial stars in the sky.

Remembering you, the innumerable waves endlessly rising in the eastern sea.

Remembering you, the moonlight glistening in endless space.

Remembering you, the delicate, sensitive rain.

One way or another, we must all take a distant journey! As soon as you no longer dwell in the mountain fastness of your primordial home with the blessings of heaven, then you begin your distant journey! On the way, you may encounter tempests and

loneliness; you may end up in some strange foreign land; you may enjoy prosperity and perhaps even savor the taste of love. In the end, you still have to continue your journey! If you construct a sturdy boat, find your true self, and pass the profound test, then you have attained the deathless.

If you stand in a certain place, you can lift the Earth; from another place, you can photograph the universe floating past like so many endlessly shifting mountains and rivers. Then you might be able to understand the subtle smile of a mountain.

The mind is as large as Mount Sumeru, and as small as a mustard seed.

This is that pure and noble essential nature! It defies description —

“Amṛta, Amṛta .....”

※ ※ ※

The sun, moon, and stars  
Are your bright eyes;  
The fluttering tall bamboos  
Are your graceful figure;  
Your intention,  
As clear as ancient ice;  
Your smiling countenance,  
As glorious as the morning sun in winter;

You aspiration,  
As vast as the ocean tides;  
Such an intimacy  
Need not be spoken.

The sacred tree in the mountains and the mountain of clouds in the sky  
Have told me  
One hundred thousand kotis of worlds to the west  
There lives a buddha.  
On the Autumn Equinox passing beyond the setting sun,  
I see your stately form;  
In that all-embracing glory,  
A meeting of minds.

A distant, inconceivable meeting .....

Thereupon I see the world within the world; I see how life is  
ingrained in sentient beings.

All of a sudden, with all its serenity and greatness, the world  
quietly comes to me, meeting my meager aspiration! If only I might  
again linger in that genial dimple, return to that real time and place.

An eternal recollection, like the red glow floating on the  
evening horizon —



New Source Literature 3

## **Amṛta**

Author: Yu Hsi

Translator: Ken Kraynak

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