Hung Lou Meng - book 2

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HUNG LOU MENG, BOOK II

OR, THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER, A CHINESE NOVEL IN TWO BOOKS

BY

CAO XUEQIN

Translated by H. BENCRAFT JOLY

H.B.M. CONSULAR SERVICE, CHINA.

BOOK II

CHAPTER XXV.

By a demoniacal art, a junior uncle and an elder brother’s wife (Pao-yü and lady Feng) come across five devils. The gem of Spiritual Perception meets, in a fit of torpor, the two perfect men.

Hsiao Hung, the story continues, was much unsettled in her mind. Her thoughts rolled on in one connected string. But suddenly she became drowsy, and falling asleep, she encountered Chia Yün, who tried to carry out his intention to drag her near him. She twisted herself round, and endeavoured to run away; but was tripped over by the doorstep. This gave her such a start that she woke up. Then, at length, she realised that it was only a dream. But so restlessly did she, in consequence of this fright, keep on rolling and tossing that she could not close her eyes during the whole night. As soon as the light of the next day dawned, she got up. Several waiting-maids came at once to tell her to go and sweep the floor of the rooms, and to bring water to wash the face with. Hsiao Hung did not even wait to arrange her hair or perform her ablutions; but, turning towards the looking-glass, she pinned her chevelure up anyhow; and, rinsing her hands, and, tying a sash round her waist, she repaired directly to sweep the apartments.

Who would have thought it, Pao-yü also had set his heart upon her the moment he caught sight of her the previous day. Yet he feared, in the first place, that if he mentioned her by name and called her over into his service, Hsi Jen and the other girls might feel the pangs of jealousy. He did not, either in the second place, have any idea what her disposition was like. The consequence was that he felt downcast; so much so, that when he got up at an early hour, he did not even comb his hair or wash, but simply remained seated, and brooded in a state of abstraction. After a while, he lowered the window. Through the gauze frame, from which he could distinctly discern what was going on outside, he espied several servant-girls, engaged in sweeping the court. All of them were rouged and powdered; they had flowers inserted in their hair, and were grandly got up. But the only one, of whom he failed to get a glimpse, was the girl he had met the day before.

Pao-yü speedily walked out of the door with slipshod shoes. Under the pretence of admiring the flowers, he glanced, now towards the east; now towards the west. But upon raising his head, he descried, in the southwest corner, some one or other leaning by the side of the railing under the covered passage. A crab-apple tree, however, obstructed the view and he could not see distinctly who it was, so advancing a step further in, he stared with intent gaze. It was, in point of fact, the waiting-maid of the day before, tarrying about plunged in a reverie. His wish was to go forward and meet her, but he did not, on the other hand, see how he could very well do so. Just as he was cogitating within himself, he, of a sudden, perceived Pi Hen come and ask him to go and wash his face. This reminder placed him under the necessity of betaking himself into his room. But we will leave him there, without further details, so as to return to Hsiao Hung.

She was communing with her own thoughts. But unawares perceiving Hsi Jen wave her hand and call her by name, she had to walk up to her.

“Our watering-pot is spoilt,” Hsi Jen smiled and said, “so go to Miss Lin’s over there and find one for us to use.”

Hsiao Hung hastened on her way towards the Hsiao Hsiang Kuan.

When she got as far as the Ts’ui Yen bridge, she saw, on raising her head and looking round, the mounds and lofty places entirely shut in by screens, and she bethought herself that labourers were that day to plant trees in that particular locality.

At a great distance off, a band of men were, in very deed, engaged in digging up the soil, while Chia Yün was seated on a boulder on the hill, superintending the works. The time came for Hsiao Hung to pass by, but she could not muster the courage to do so. Nevertheless she had no other course than to quietly proceed to the Hsiao Hsiang Kuan. Then getting the watering-pot, she sped on her way back again. But being in low spirits, she retired alone into her room and lay herself down. One and all, however, simply maintained that she was out of sorts, so they did not pay any heed to her.

A day went by. On the morrow fell, in fact, the anniversary of the birth of Wang Tzu-t’eng’s spouse, and some one was despatched from his residence to come and invite dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang. Madame Wang found out however that dowager lady Chia would not avail herself of the invitation, and

neither would she go. So Mrs. Hsüeh went along with lady Feng, and the three sisters of the Chia family, and Pao-ch'ai and Pao-yü, and only returned home late in the evening.

Madame Wang was sitting in Mrs. Hsüeh's apartments, whither she had just crossed, when she perceived Chia Huan come back from school, and she bade him transcribe incantations out of the Chin Kang Canon and intonate them. Chia Huan accordingly came and seated himself on the stovecouch, occupied by Madame Wang, and, directing a servant to light the candles, he started copying in an ostentatious and dashing manner. Now he called Ts'ai Hsia to pour a cup of tea for him. Now he asked Yu Ch'uan to take the scissors and cut the snuff of the wick. "Chin Ch'uan!" he next cried, "you're in the way of the rays of the lamp."

The servant-girls had all along entertained an antipathy for him, and not one of them therefore worried her mind about what he said. Ts'ai Hsia was the only one who still got on well with him, so pouring a cup of tea, she handed it to him. But she felt prompted to whisper to him: "Keep quiet a bit! what's the use of making people dislike you?"

"I know myself how matters stand," Chia Huan rejoined, as he cast a steady glance at her; "so don't you try and befool me! Now that you are on intimate terms with Pao-yü, you don't pay much heed to me. I've also seen through it myself."

Ts'ai Hsiao set her teeth together, and gave him a fillip on the head. "You heartless fellow!" she cried. "You're like the dog, that bit Lü T'ung-pin. You have no idea of what's right and what's wrong!"

While these two nagged away, they noticed lady Feng and Madame Wang cross together over to them. Madame Wang at once assailed him with questions. She asked him how many ladies had been present on that day, whether the play had been good or bad, and what the banquet had been like.

But a brief interval over, Pao-yü too appeared on the scene. After saluting Madame Wang, he also made a few remarks, with all decorum; and then bidding a servant remove his frontlet, divest him of his long gown and pull off his boots, he rushed head foremost, into his mother's lap.

Madame Wang caressed and patted him. But while Pao-yü clung to his mother's neck, he spoke to her of one thing and then another.

“My child,” said Madame Wang, “you’ve again had too much to drink; your face is scalding hot, and if you still keep on rubbing and scraping it, why, you’ll by and bye stir up the fumes of wine! Don’t you yet go and lie down quietly over there for a little!”

Chiding him the while, she directed a servant to fetch a pillow. Pao-yü therefore lay himself down at the back of Madame Wang, and called Ts’ai Hsia to come and stroke him.

Pao-yü then began to bandy words with Ts’ai Hsia. But perceiving that Ts’ai Hsia was reserved, and, that instead of paying him any attention, she kept her eyes fixed upon Chia Huan, Pao-yü eagerly took her hand. “My dear girl!” he said; “do also heed me a little;” and as he gave utterance to this appeal, he kept her hand clasped in his.

Ts’ai Hsia, however, drew her hand away and would not let him hold it. “If you go on in this way,” she vehemently exclaimed, “I’ll shout out at once.”

These two were in the act of wrangling, when verily Chia Huan overheard what was going on. He had, in fact, all along hated Pao-yü; so when on this occasion, he espied him up to his larks with Ts’ai Hsia, he could much less than ever stifle feelings of resentment in his heart. After some reflection, therefore, an idea suggested itself to his mind, and pretending that it was by a slip of the hand, he shoved the candle, overflowing with tallow, into Pao-yü‘s face.

“Ai ya!” Pao-yü was heard to exclaim. Every one in the whole room was plunged in consternation. With precipitate haste, the lanterns, standing on the floor, were moved over; and, with the first ray of light, they discovered that Pao-yü‘s face was one mass of tallow.

Madame Wang gave way to anger as well as anxiety. At one time, she issued directions to the servants to rub and wash Pao-yü clean. At another, she heaped abuse upon Chia Huan.

Lady Feng jumped on to the stone-couch by leaps and bounds. But while intent upon removing the stuff from Pao-yü‘s face, she simultaneously ejaculated: “Master Tertius, are you still such a trickster! I’ll tell you what, you’ll never turn to any good account! Yet dame Chao should ever correct and admonish him.”

This single remark suggested the idea to Madame Wang, and she lost no time in

sending for Mrs. Chao to come round.

“You bring up,” she berated her, “such a black-hearted offspring like this, and don’t you, after all, advise and reprove him? Time and again I paid no notice whatever to what happened, and you and he have become more audacious, and have gone from worse to worse!”

Mrs. Chao had no alternative but to suppress every sense of injury, silence all grumblings, and go herself and lend a hand to the others in tidying Pao-yü. She then perceived that a whole row of blisters had risen on the left side of Pao-yü‘s face, but that fortunately no injury had been done to his eyes.

When Madame Wang’s attention was drawn to them she felt her heart sore. It fell a prey to fears also lest when dowager lady Chia made any inquiries about them she should find it difficult to give her any satisfactory reply. And so distressed did she get that she gave Mrs. Chao another scolding. But while she tried to comfort Pao-yü, she, at the same time, fetched some powder for counteracting the effects of the virus, and applied it on his face.

“It’s rather sore,” said Pao-yü, “but it’s nothing to speak of. Tomorrow when my old grandmother asks about it, I can simply explain that I scalded it myself; that will be quite enough to tell her.”

“If you say that you scalded it yourself,” lady Feng observed, “why, she’ll also call people to task for not looking out; and a fit of rage will, beyond doubt, be the outcome of it all.”

Madame Wang then ordered the servants to take care and escort Pao-yü back to his room. On their arrival, Hsi Jen and his other attendants saw him, and they were all in a great state of flurry.

As for Lin Tai-yü, when she found that Pao-yü had gone out of doors, she continued the whole day a prey to ennui. In the evening, she deputed messengers two and three times to go and inquire about him. But when she came to know that he had been scalded, she hurried in person to come and see him. She then discovered Pao-yü all alone, holding a glass and scanning his features in it; while the left side of his face was plastered all over with some medicine.

Lin Tai-yü imagined that the burn was of an extremely serious nature, and she hastened to approach him with a view to examine it. Pao-yü, however, screened

his face, and, waving his hand, bade her leave the room; for knowing her usual knack for tidiness he did not feel inclined to let her get a glimpse of his face. Tai-yü then gave up the attempt, and confined herself to asking him: “whether it was very painful?”

“It isn’t very sore,” replied Pao-yü, “if I look after it for a day or two, it will get all right.”

But after another short stay, Lin Tai-yü repaired back to her quarters.

The next day Pao-yü saw dowager lady Chia. But in spite of his confession that he himself was responsible for the scalding of his face, his grandmother could not refrain from reading another lecture to the servants who had been in attendance.

A day after, Ma, a Taoist matron, whose name was recorded as Pao-yü‘s godmother, came on a visit to the mansion. Upon perceiving Pao-yü, she was very much taken aback, and asked all about the circumstances of the accident. When he explained that he had been scalded, she forthwith shook her head and heaved a sigh; then while making with her fingers a few passes over Pao-yü‘s face, she went on to mutter incantations for several minutes. “I can guarantee that he’ll get all right,” she added, “for this is simply a sadden and fleeting accident!”

Turning towards dowager lady Chia: “Venerable ancestor,” she observed, “Venerable Buddha! how could you ever be aware of the existence of the portentous passage in that Buddhistic classic, ‘to the effect that a son of every person, who holds the dignity of prince, duke or high functionary, has no sooner come into the world and reached a certain age than numerous evil spirits at once secretly haunt him, and pinch him, when they find an opportunity; or dig their nails into him; or knock his bowl of rice down, during, meal-time; or give him a shove and send him over, while he is quietly seated.’ So this is the reason why the majority of the sons and grandsons of those distinguished families do not grow up to attain manhood.”

Dowager lady Chia, upon hearing her speak in this wise, eagerly asked: “Is there any Buddhistic spell, by means of which to check their influence or not?”

“This is an easy job!” rejoined the Taoist matron Ma, “all one need do is to perform several meritorious deeds on his account so as to counteract the

consequences of retribution and everything will then be put right. That canon further explains: ‘that in the western part of the world there is a mighty Buddha, whose glory illumines all things, and whose special charge is to cast his lustre on the evil spirits in dark places; that if any benevolent man or virtuous woman offers him oblations with sincerity of heart, he is able to so successfully perpetuate the peace and quiet of their sons and grandsons that these will no more meet with any calamities arising from being possessed by malevolent demons.’”

“But what, I wonder,” inquired dowager lady Chia, “could be offered to this god?”

“Nothing of any great value,” answered the Taoist matron, Ma. “Exclusive of offerings of scented candles, several catties of scented oil can be added, each day, to keep the lantern of the Great Sea alight. This ‘Great Sea’ lantern is the visible embodiment and Buddhistic representation of this divinity, so day and night we don’t venture to let it go out!”

“For a whole day and a whole night,” asked dowager lady Chia, “how much oil is needed, so that I too should accomplish a good action?”

“There is really no limit as to quantity. It rests upon the goodwill of the donor,” Ma, the Taoist matron, put in by way of reply. “In my quarters, for instance, I have several lanterns, the gifts of the consorts of princes and the spouses of high officials living in various localities. The consort of the mansion of the Prince of Nan Au has been prompted in her beneficence by a liberal spirit; she allows each day forty-eight catties of oil, and a catty of wick; so that her ‘Great Sea’ lamp is only a trifle smaller than a water-jar. The spouse of the marquis of Chin Hsiang comes next, with no more than twenty catties a day. Besides these, there are several other families; some giving ten catties; some eight catties; some three; some five; subject to no fixed rule; and of course I feel bound to keep the lanterns alight on their behalf.”

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head and gave way to reflection.

“There’s still another thing,” continued the Taoist matron, Ma. “If it be on account of father or mother or seniors, any excessive donation would not matter. But were you, venerable ancestor, to bestow too much in your offering for Pao-yü, our young master won’t, I fear, be equal to the gift; and instead of being

benefited, his happiness will be snapped. If you therefore want to make a liberal gift seven catties will do; if a small one, then five catties will even be sufficient."

"Well, in that case," responded dowager lady Chia, "let us fix upon five catties a day, and every month come and receive payment of the whole lump sum!"

"O-mi-to-fu!" exclaimed Ma, the Taoist matron, "Oh merciful, and mighty P'u Sa!"

Dowager lady Chia then called the servants and impressed on their minds that whenever Pao-yü went out of doors in the future, they should give several strings of cash to the pages to bestow on charity among the bonzes and Taoist priests, and the poor and needy they might meet on the way.

These directions concluded, the Taoist matron trudged into the various quarters, and paid her respects, and then strolled leisurely about. Presently, she entered Mrs. Chao's apartments. After the two ladies had exchanged salutations, Mrs. Chao bade a young servant-girl hand her guest a cup of tea. While Mrs. Chao busied herself pasting shoes, Ma, the Taoist matron, espied, piled up in a heap on the stovecouch, sundry pieces of silks and satins. "It just happens," she consequently remarked, "that I have no facings for shoes, so my lady do give me a few odd cuttings of silk and satin, of no matter what colour, to make myself a pair of shoes with."

Mrs. Chao heaved a sigh. "Look," she said, "whether there be still among them any pieces good for anything. But anything that's worth anything doesn't find its way in here. If you don't despise what's worthless, you're at liberty to select any two pieces and to take them away, and have done."

The Taoist matron, Ma, chose with alacrity several pieces and shoved them in her breast.

"The other day," Mrs. Chao went on to inquire, "I sent a servant over with five hundred cash; have you presented any offerings before the god of medicine or not?"

"I've offered them long ago for you," the Taoist matron Ma rejoined.

"O-mi-to-fu!" ejaculated Mrs. Chao with a sigh, "were I a little better off, I'd also come often and offer gifts; but though my will be boundless, my means are

insufficient!”

“Don’t trouble your mind on this score,” suggested Ma, the Taoist matron. “By and bye, when Mr. Huan has grown up into a man and obtained some official post or other, will there be then any fear of your not being able to afford such offerings as you might like to make?”

At these words Mrs. Chao gave a smile. “Enough, enough!” she cried. “Don’t again refer to such contingencies! the present is a fair criterion. For up to whom in this house can my son and I come? Pao-yü is still a mere child; but he is such that he wins people’s love. Those big people may be partial to him, and love him a good deal, I’ve nothing to say to it; but I can’t eat humble pie to this sort of mistress!”

While uttering this remark, she stretched out her two fingers.

Ma, the Taoist matron, understood the meaning she desired to convey. “It’s your lady Secunda, Lien, eh?” she forthwith asked.

Mrs. Chao was filled with trepidation. Hastily waving her hand, she got to her feet, raised the portiere, and peeped outside. Perceiving that there was no one about, she at length retraced her footsteps. “Dreadful!” she then said to the Taoist matron. “Dreadful! But speaking of this sort of mistress, I’m not so much as a human being, if she doesn’t manage to shift over into her mother’s home the whole of this family estate.”

“Need you tell me this!” Ma, the Taoist matron, at these words, remarked with a view to ascertain what she implied. “Haven’t I, forsooth, discovered it all for myself? Yet it’s fortunate that you don’t trouble your minds about her; for it’s far better that you should let her have her own way.”

“My dear woman,” rejoined Mrs. Chao, “Not let her have her own way! why, is it likely that any one would have the courage to tell her anything?”

“I don’t mean to utter any words that may bring upon me retribution,” added Ma, the Taoist matron, “but you people haven’t got the wits. But it’s no matter of surprise. Yet if you daren’t openly do anything, why, you could stealthily have devised some plan. And do you still tarry up to this day?”

Mrs. Chao realised that there lurked something in her insinuation, and she felt an

inward secret joy. “What plan could I stealthily devise?” she asked. “I’ve got the will right enough, but I’m not a person gifted with this sort of gumption. So were you to impart to me some way or other, I would reward you most liberally.”

When the Taoist matron, Ma, heard this, she drew near to her. “O-mi-to-fu! desist at once from asking me!” she designedly exclaimed. “How can I know anything about such matters, contrary as they are to what is right?”

“There you are again!” Mrs. Chao replied. “You’re one ever most ready to succour those in distress, and to help those in danger, and is it likely that you’ll quietly look on, while some one comes and compasses my death as well as that of my son? Are you, pray, fearful lest I shouldn’t give you any reward?”

Ma, the Taoist matron, greeted this remark with a smile. “You’re right enough in what you say,” she ventured, “of my being unable to bear the sight of yourself and son receiving insult from a third party; but as for your mention of rewards, why, what’s there of yours that I still covet?”

This answer slightly reassured Mrs. Chao’s mind. “How is it,” she speedily urged, “that an intelligent person like you should have become so dense? If, indeed, the spell prove efficacious, and we exterminate them both, is there any apprehension that this family estate won’t be ours? and when that time comes, won’t you get all you may wish?”

At this disclosure, Ma, the Taoist matron, lowered her head for a long time. “When everything,” she observed, “shall have been settled satisfactorily, and when there’ll be, what’s more, no proof at all, will you still pay any heed to me?”

“What’s there hard about this?” remarked Mrs. Chao. “I’ve saved several taels from my own pin-money, and have besides a good number of clothes and head-ornaments. So you can first take several of these away with you. And I’ll further write an I.O.U., and entrust it to you, and when that time does come, I’ll pay you in full.”

“That will do!” answered the Taoist matron, Ma.

Mrs. Chao thereupon dismissed even a young servant-girl, who happened to be in the room, and hastily opening a trunk, she produced several articles of clothing and jewelry, as well as a few odd pieces of silver from her own pocket-

money. Then also writing a promissory note for fifty taels, she surrendered the lot to Ma, the Taoist matron. “Take these,” she said, “in advance for presents in your temple.”

At the sight of the various articles and of the promissory note, the Taoist matron became at once unmindful of what was right and what was wrong; and while her mouth was full of assent, she stretched out her arm, and first and foremost laid hold of the hard cash, and next clutched the I.O.U. Turning then towards Mrs. Chao, she asked for a sheet of paper; and taking up a pair of scissors, she cut out two human beings and gave them to Mrs. Chao, enjoining her to write on the upper part of them the respective ages of the two persons in question. Looking further for a sheet of blue paper, she cut out five blue-faced devils, which she bade her place together side by side with the paper men, and taking a pin she made them fast. “When I get home,” she remarked, “I’ll have recourse to some art, which will, beyond doubt, prove efficacious.”

When she however had done speaking, she suddenly saw Madame Wang’s waiting-maid make her appearance inside the room. “What! my dame, are you in here!” the girl exclaimed. “Why, our lady is waiting for you!”

The two dames then parted company.

But passing them over, we will now allude to Lin Tai-yµ. As Pao-yü had scalded his face, and did not go out of doors very much, she often came to have a chat with him. On this particular day she took up, after her meal, some book or other and read a couple of pages out of it. Next, she busied herself a little with needlework, in company with Tzu Chuan. She felt however thoroughly dejected and out of sorts. So she strolled out of doors along with her. But catching sight of the newly sprouted bamboo shoots, in front of the pavilion, they involuntarily stepped out of the entrance of the court, and penetrated into the garden. They cast their eyes on all four quarters; but not a soul was visible. When they became conscious of the splendour of the flowers and the chatter of the birds, they, with listless step, turned their course towards the I Hung court. There they found several servant-girls baling out water; while a bevy of them stood under the verandah, watching the thrushes having their bath. They heard also the sound of laughter in the rooms.

The fact is that Li Kung-ts’ai, lady Feng, and Pao-ch’ai were assembled inside. As soon as they saw them walk in, they with one voice shouted, smiling: “Now,

are not these two more!”

“We are a full company to-day,” laughed Tai-yü, “but who has issued the cards and invited us here?”

“The other day,” interposed lady Feng, “I sent servants with a present of two caddies of tea for you, Miss Lin; was it, after all, good?”

“I had just forgotten all about it,” Tai-yü rejoined, “many thanks for your kind attention!

“I tasted it,” observed Pao-yü. “I did not think it anything good. But I don’t know how others, who’ve had any of it, find it.”

“Its flavour,” said Tai-yü, “is good; the only thing is, it has no colour.”

“It’s tribute tea from the Laos Kingdom,” continued lady Feng. “When I tried it, I didn’t either find it anything very fine. It’s not up to what we ordinarily drink.”

“To my taste, it’s all right,” put in Tai-yü. “But what your palates are like, I can’t make out.”

“As you say it’s good,” suggested Pao-yü, “you’re quite at liberty to take all I have for your use.”

“I’ve got a great deal more of it over there,” lady Feng remarked.

“I’ll tell a servant-girl to go and fetch it,” Tai-yü replied.

“No need,” lady Feng went on. “I’ll send it over with some one. I also have a favour to ask of you tomorrow, so I may as well tell the servant to bring it along at the same time.”

When Lin Tai-yü heard these words, she put on a smile. “You just mark this,” she observed. “I’ve had to-day a little tea from her place, and she at once begins making a tool of me!”

“Since you’ve had some of our tea,” lady Feng laughed, “how is it that you have not yet become a wife in our household?”

The whole party burst out laughing aloud. So much so, that they found it difficult to repress themselves. But Tai-yü‘s face was suffused with blushes. She turned her head the other way, and uttered not a word.

“Our sister-in-law Secunda’s jibes are first-rate!” Pao-ch’ai chimed in with a laugh.

“What jibes!” exclaimed Tai-yü; “they’re purely and simply the prattle of a mean mouth and vile tongue! They’re enough to evoke people’s displeasure!”

Saying this, she went on to sputter in disgust.

“Were you,” insinuated lady Feng, “to become a wife in my family, what is there that you would lack?” Pointing then at Pao-yü, “Look here!” she cried—“Is not this human being worthy of you? Is not his station in life good enough for you? Are not our stock and estate sufficient for you? and in what slight degree can he make you lose caste?”

Tai-yü rose to her feet, and retired immediately. But Pao-ch’ai shouted out: “Here’s P’in Erh in a huff! Don’t you yet come back? when you’ve gone, there will really be no fun!”

While calling out to her, she jumped up to pull her back. As soon, however, as she reached the door of the room, she beheld Mrs. Chao, accompanied by Mrs. Chou; both coming to look up Pao-yü. Pao-yü and his companions got up in a body and pressed them into a seat. Lady Feng was the sole person who did not heed them.

But just as Pao-ch’ai was about to open her lips, she perceived a servant-girl, attached to Madame Wang’s apartments, appear on the scene. “Your maternal uncle’s wife has come,” she said, “and she requests you, ladies and young ladies, to come out and see her.”

Li Kung-ts’ai hurriedly walked away in company with lady Feng. The two dames, Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou, in like manner took their leave and quitted the room.

“As for me, I can’t go out,” Pao-yü shouted. “But whatever you do, pray, don’t ask aunt to come in here.” “Cousin Lin,” he went on to say, “do stay on a while; I’ve got something to tell you.”

Lady Feng overheard him. Turning her head towards Lin Tai-yü, “There’s some one,” she cried; “who wants to speak to you.” And forthwith laying hold of Lin Tai-yü, she pushed her back and then trudged away, along with Li Kung-ts’ai.

During this time, Pao-yü clasped Tai-yü‘s hand in his. He did nothing than smile. But not a word did he utter. Tai-yü naturally, therefore, got crimson in the face, and struggled to escape his importunities.

“Ai-ya!” exclaimed Pao-yü. “How my head is sore!”

“It should be!” rejoined Tai-yü. “O-mi-to-fu.”

Pao-yü then gave vent to a loud shout. His body bounced three or four feet high from the ground. His mouth was full of confused shrieks. But all he said was rambling talk.

Tai-yü and the servant-girls were full of consternation, and, with all possible haste, they ran and apprised Madame Wang and dowager lady Chia.

Wang Tzu-t’eng’s wife was, at this time, also with them, so they all came in a body to see him. Pao-yü behaved more and more as if determined to clutch a sword or seize a spear to put an end to his existence. He raged in a manner sufficient to subvert the heavens and upset the earth.

As soon as dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang caught sight of him, they were struck with terror. They trembled wildly like a piece of clothing that is being shaken. Uttering a shout of: “My son,” and another of: “My flesh,” they burst out into a loud fit of crying. Presently, all the inmates were seized with fright. Even Chia She, Madame Hsing, Chia Cheng, Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Jung, Chia Yün, Chia P’ing, Mrs. Hsüeh, Hsüeh P’an, Chou Jui’s wife, and the various members of the household, whether high or low, and the servant-girls and married women too, rushed into the garden to see what was up.

The confusion that prevailed was, at the moment, like entangled flax. Every one was at a loss what to do, when they espied lady Feng dash into the garden, a glistening sword in hand, and try to cut down everything that came in her way, ogle vacantly whomsoever struck her gaze, and make forthwith an attempt to despatch them. A greater panic than ever broke out among the whole assemblage. But placing herself at the head of a handful of sturdy female servants, Chou Jui’s wife precipitated herself forward, and clasping her tight,

they succeeded in snatching the sword from her grip, and carrying her back into her room.

P'ing Erh, Feng Erh, and the other girls began to weep. They invoked the heavens and appealed to the earth. Even Chia Cheng was distressed at heart. One and all at this stage started shouting, some, one thing; some, another. Some suggested exorcists. Some cried out for the posture-makers to attract the devils. Others recommended that Chang, the Taoist priest, of the Yü Huang temple, should catch the evil spirits. A thorough turmoil reigned supreme for a long time. The gods were implored. Prayers were offered. Every kind of remedy was tried, but no benefit whatever became visible.

After sunset, the spouse of Wang Tzu-t'eng said goodbye and took her departure. On the ensuing day, Wang Tzu-t'eng himself also came to make inquiries. Following closely upon him, arrived, in a body, messengers from the young marquis Shih, Madame Hsing's young brother, and their various relatives to ascertain for themselves how (lady Feng and Pao-yü) were progressing. Some brought charm-water. Some recommended bonzes and Taoist priests. Others spoke highly of doctors. But that young fellow and his elder brother's wife fell into such greater and greater stupor that they lost all consciousness. Their bodies were hot like fire. As they lay prostrate on their beds, they talked deliriously. With the fall of the shades of night their condition aggravated. So much so, that the matrons and servant-girls did not venture to volunteer their attendance. They had, therefore, to be both moved into Madame Wang's quarters, where servants were told off to take their turn and watch them.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang, Madame Hsing and Mrs. Hsüeh did not budge an inch or a step from their side. They sat round them, and did nothing but cry. Chia She and Chia Cheng too were a prey, at this juncture, to misgivings lest weeping should upset dowager lady Chia. Day and night oil was burnt and fires were, mindless of expense, kept alight. The bustle and confusion was such that no one, either master or servant, got any rest.

Chia She also sped on every side in search of Buddhist and Taoist priests. But Chia Cheng had witnessed how little relief these things could afford, and he felt constrained to dissuade Chia She from his endeavours. "The destiny," he argued, "of our son and daughter is entirely dependent upon the will of Heaven, and no human strength can prevail. The malady of these two persons would not be healed, even were every kind of treatment tried, and as I feel confident that it is

the design of heaven that things should be as they are, all we can do is to allow it to carry out its purpose."

Chia She, however, paid no notice to his remonstrances and continued as hitherto to fuss in every imaginable way. In no time three days elapsed. Lady Feng and Pao-yü were still confined to their beds. Their very breaths had grown fainter. The whole household, therefore, unanimously arrived at the conclusion that there was no hope, and with all despatch they made every necessary preparation for the subsequent requirements of both their relatives.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang, Chia Lien, P'ing Erh, Hsi Jen and the others indulged in tears with keener and keener anguish. They hung between life and death. Mrs. Chao alone was the one who assumed an outward sham air of distress, while in her heart she felt her wishes gratified.

The fourth day arrived. At an early hour Pao-yü suddenly opened his eyes and addressed himself to his grandmother Chia. "From this day forward," he said, "I may no longer abide in your house, so you had better send me off at once!"

These words made dowager lady Chia feel as if her very heart had been wrenched out of her. Mrs. Chao, who stood by, exhorted her. "You shouldn't, venerable lady," she said, "indulge in excessive grief. This young man has been long ago of no good; so wouldn't it be as well to dress him up and let him go back a moment sooner from this world. You'll also be thus sparing him considerable suffering. But, if you persist, in not reconciling yourself to the separation and this breath of his is not cut off, he will lie there and suffer without any respite…."

Her arguments were scarcely ended, when she was spat upon by dowager lady Chia. "You rotten-tongued, good-for-nothing hag!" she cried abusively. "What makes you fancy him of no good! You wish him dead and gone; but what benefit will you then derive? Don't give way to any dreams; for, if he does die, I'll just exact your lives from you! It's all because you've been continuously at him, inciting and urging him to read and write, that his spirit has become so intimidated that, at the sight of his father, he behaves just like a rat trying to get out of the way of a cat! And is not all this the result of the bullying of such a mean herd of women as yourselves! Could you now drive him to death, your wishes would immediately be fulfilled; but which of you will I let off?"

Now she shed tears; now she gave vent to abuse.

Chia Cheng, who stood by, heard these invectives; and they so enhanced his exasperation that he promptly shouted out and made Mrs. Chao withdraw. He then exerted himself for a time to console (his senior) by using kindly accents. But suddenly some one came to announce that the two coffins had been completed. This announcement pierced, like a dagger, dowager lady Chia to the heart; and while weeping with despair more intense, she broke forth in violent upbraidings.

“Who is it,”—she inquired; “who gave orders to make the coffins? Bring at once the coffin-makers and beat them to death!”

A stir ensued sufficient to convulse the heavens and to subvert the earth. But at an unforeseen moment resounded in the air the gentle rapping of a ‘wooden fish’ bell. A voice recited the sentence: “Ave! Buddha able to unravel retribution and dispel grievances! Should any human being lie in sickness, and his family be solicitous on his account; or should any one have met with evil spirits and come across any baleful evils, we have the means to effect a cure.”

Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang at once directed servants to go out into the street and find out who it was. It turned out to be, in fact, a mangy-headed bonze and a hobbling Taoist priest. What was the appearance of the bonze?

His nose like a suspended gall; his two eyebrows so long, His eyes, resembling radiant stars, possessed a precious glow, His coat in tatters and his shoes of straw, without a home; Rolling in filth, and, a worse fate, his head one mass of boils.

And the Taoist priest, what was he like?

With one leg perchèd high he comes, with one leg low; His whole frame drenching wet, bespattered all with mud. If you perchance meet him, and ask him where’s his home, “In fairyland, west of the ‘Weak Water,’ he’ll say.”

Chia Cheng ordered the servants to invite them to walk in. “On what hill,” he asked those two persons, “do you cultivate the principles of reason?

“Worthy official!” the bonze smiled, “you must not ask too many questions! It’s because we’ve learnt that there are inmates of your honourable mansion in a

poor state of health that we come with the express design of working a cure."

"There are," explained Chia Cheng, "two of our members, who have been possessed of evil spirits. But, is there, I wonder, any remedy by means of which they could he healed?"

"In your family," laughingly observed the Taoist priest, "you have ready at hand a precious thing, the like of which is rare to find in the world. It possesses the virtue of alleviating the ailment, so why need you inquire about remedies?"

Chia Cheng's mind was forthwith aroused. "It's true," he consequently rejoined, "that my son brought along with him, at the time of his birth, a piece of jade, on the surface of which was inscribed that it had the virtue of dispelling evil influences, but we haven't seen any efficacy in it."

"There is, worthy officer," said the bonze, "something in it which you do not understand. That precious jade was, in its primitive state, efficacious, but consequent upon its having been polluted by music, lewdness, property and gain it has lost its spiritual properties. But produce now that valuable thing and wait till I have taken it into my hands and pronounced incantations over it, when it will become as full of efficacy as of old!"

Chia Cheng accordingly unclasped the piece of jade from Pao-yü's neck, and handed it to the two divines. The Buddhist priest held it with reverence in the palm of his hand and heaving a deep sigh, "Since our parting," he cried, "at the foot of the Ch'ing Keng peak, about thirteen years have elapsed. How time flies in the mortal world! Thine earthly destiny has not yet been determined. Alas, alas! how admirable were the qualities thou did'st possess in those days!

"By Heaven unrestrained, without constraint from Earth, No joys lived in thy heart, but sorrows none as well; Yet when perception, through refinement, thou did'st reach, Thou went'st among mankind to trouble to give rise. How sad the lot which thou of late hast had to hear! Powder prints and rouge stains thy precious lustre dim. House bars both day and night encage thee like a duck. Deep wilt thou sleep, but from thy dream at length thou'lt wake, Thy debt of vengeance, once discharged, thou wilt depart."

At the conclusion of this recital, he again rubbed the stone for a while, and gave vent to some nonsensical utterances, after which he surrendered it to Chia Cheng. "This object," he said, "has already resumed its efficacy; but you

shouldn’t do anything to desecrate it. Hang it on the post of the door in his bedroom, and with the exception of his own relatives, you must not let any outside female pollute it. After the expiry of thirty-three days, he will, I can guarantee, be all right.”

Chia Cheng then gave orders to present tea; but the two priests had already walked away. He had, however, no alternative but to comply with their injunctions, and lady Feng and Pao-yü, in point of fact, got better from day to day. Little by little they returned to their senses and experienced hunger. Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, at length, felt composed in their minds. All the cousins heard the news outside. Tai-yü, previous to anything else, muttered a prayer to Buddha; while Pao-ch’ai laughed and said not a word.

“Sister Pao,” inquired Hsi Ch’un, “what are you laughing for?”

“I laugh,” replied Pao-ch’ai, “because the ‘Thus-Come’ Joss has more to do than any human being. He’s got to see to the conversion of all mankind, and to take care of the ailments, to which all flesh is heir; for he restores every one of them at once to health; and he has as well to control people’s marriages so as to bring them about through his aid; and what do you say, has he ample to do or not? Now, isn’t this enough to make one laugh, eh?”

Lin Tai-yü blushed. “Ts’ui!” she exclaimed; “none of you are good people. Instead of following the example of worthy persons, you try to rival the mean mouth of that hussey Feng.”

As she uttered these words, she raised the portiere and made her exit.

But, reader, do you want to know any further circumstances? If so, the next chapter will explain them to you.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On the Feng Yao bridge, Hsiao Hung makes known sentimental matters in equivocal language. In the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, Tai-yü gives, while under the effects of the spring lassitude, expression to her secret feelings.

After thirty days' careful nursing, Pao-yü, we will now notice, not only got strong and hale in body, but the scars even on his face completely healed up; so he was able to shift his quarters again into the garden of Broad Vista.

But we will banish this topic as it does not deserve any additional explanations. Let us now turn our attention elsewhere. During the time that Pao-yü was of late laid up in bed, Chia Yün along with the young pages of the household sat up on watch to keep an eye over him, and both day and night, they tarried on this side of the mansion. But Hsiao Hung as well as all the other waiting-maids remained in the same part to nurse Pao-yü, so (Chia Yün) and she saw a good deal of each other on several occasions, and gradually an intimacy sprung up between them.

Hsiao Hung observed that Chia Yün held in his hand a handkerchief very much like the one she herself had dropped some time ago and was bent upon asking him for it, but she did, on the other hand, not think she could do so with propriety. The unexpected visit of the bonze and Taoist priest rendered, however, superfluous the services of the various male attendants, and Chia-yün had therefore to go again and oversee the men planting the trees. Now she had a mind to drop the whole question, but she could not reconcile herself to it; and now she longed to go and ask him about it, but fears rose in her mind lest people should entertain any suspicions as to the relations that existed between them. But just as she faltered, quite irresolute, and her heart was thoroughly unsettled, she unawares heard some one outside inquire: "Sister, are you in the room or not?"

Hsiao Hung, upon catching this question, looked out through a hole in the window; and perceiving at a glance that it was no one else than a young servant-girl, attached to the same court as herself, Chia Hui by name, she consequently said by way of reply: "Yes, I am; come in!"

When these words reached her ear, Chia Hui ran in, and taking at once a seat on the bed, she observed with a smile: "How lucky I've been! I was a little time back in the court washing a few things, when Pao-yü cried out that some tea should be sent over to Miss Lin, and sister Hua handed it to me to go on the errand. By a strange coincidence our old lady had presented some money to Miss Lin and she was engaged at the moment in distributing it among their servant-girls. As soon therefore as she saw me get there, Miss Lin forthwith grasped two handfuls of cash and gave them to me; how many there are I don't know, but do keep them for me!"

Speedily then opening her handkerchief, she emptied the cash. Hsiao Hung counted them for her by fives and tens at a time. She was beginning to put them away, when Chia Hui remarked: “How are you, after all, feeling of late in your mind? I’ll tell you what; you should really go and stay at home for a couple of days. And were you to ask a doctor round and to have a few doses of medicine you’ll get all right at once!”

“What are you talking about?” Hsiao Hung replied. “What shall I go home for, when there’s neither rhyme nor reason for it!”

“Miss Lin, I remember, is naturally of a weak physique, and has constantly to take medicines,” Chia Hui added, “so were you to ask her for some and bring them over and take them, it would come to the same thing.”

“Nonsense!” rejoined Hsiao Hung, “are medicines also to be recklessly taken ?”

“You can’t so on for ever like this,” continued Chia Hui; “you’re besides loth to eat and loth to drink, and what will you be like in the long run?”

“What’s there to fear?” observed Hsiao Hung; “won’t it anyhow be better to die a little earlier? It would be a riddance!”

“Why do you deliberately come out with all this talk?” Chia Hui demurred.

“How could you ever know anything of the secrets of my heart?” Hsiao Hung inquired.

Chia Hui nodded her head and gave way to reflection. “I don’t think it strange on your part,” she said after a time; “for it is really difficult to abide in this place! Yesterday, for instance, our dowager lady remarked that the servants in attendance had had, during all the days that Pao-yü was ill, a good deal to put up with, and that now that he has recovered, incense should be burnt everywhere, and the vows fulfilled; and she expressed a wish that those in his service should, one and all, be rewarded according to their grade. I and several others can be safely looked upon as young in years, and unworthy to presume so high; so I don’t feel in any way aggrieved; but how is it that one like you couldn’t be included in the number? My heart is much annoyed at it! Had there been any fear that Hsi Jen would have got ten times more, I could not even then have felt sore against her, for she really deserves it! I’ll just tell you an honest truth; who else is there like her? Not to speak of the diligence and carefulness she has

displayed all along, even had she not been so diligent and careful, she couldn't have been set aside! But what is provoking is that that lot, like Ch'ing Wen and Ch'i Hsia, should have been included in the upper class. Yet it's because every one places such reliance on the fine reputation of their father and mother that they exalt them. Now, do tell me, is this sufficient to anger one or not?"

"It won't do to be angry with them!" Hsiao Hung observed. "The proverb says: 'You may erect a shed a thousand *li* long, but there is no entertainment from which the guests will not disperse!' And who is it that will tarry here for a whole lifetime? In another three years or five years every single one of us will have gone her own way; and who will, when that time comes, worry her mind about any one else?"

These allusions had the unexpected effect of touching Chia Hui to the heart; and in spite of herself the very balls of her eyes got red. But so uneasy did she feel at crying for no reason that she had to exert herself to force a smile. "What you say is true," she ventured. "And yet, Pao-yü even yesterday explained how the rooms should be arranged by and bye; and how the clothes should be made, just as if he was bound to hang on to dear life for several hundreds of years."

Hsiao Hung, at these words, gave a couple of sardonic smiles. But when about to pass some remark, she perceived a youthful servant-girl, who had not as yet let her hair grow, walk in, holding in her hands several patterns and two sheets of paper. "You are asked," she said, "to trace these two designs!"

As she spoke, she threw them at Hsiao Hung, and twisting herself round, she immediately scampered away.

"Whose are they, after all?" Hsiao Hung inquired, addressing herself outside. "Couldn't you wait even so much as to conclude what you had to say, but flew off at once? Who is steaming bread and waiting for you? Or are you afraid, forsooth, lest it should get cold?"

"They belong to sister Ch'i," the young servant-girl merely returned for answer from outside the window; and raising her feet high, she ran tramp-tramp on her way back again.

Hsiao Hung lost control over her temper, and snatching the designs, she flung them on one side. She then rummaged in a drawer for a pencil, but finding, after a prolonged search, that they were all blunt; "Where did I," she thereupon

ejaculated, “put that brand-new pencil the other day? How is it I can’t remember where it is?”

While she soliloquised, she became wrapt in thought. After some reflection she, at length, gave a smile. “Of course!” she exclaimed, “the other evening Ying Erh took it away.” And turning towards Chia Hui, “Fetch it for me,” she shouted.

“Sister Hua,” Chia Hui rejoined, “is waiting for me to get a box for her, so you had better go for it yourself!”

“What!” remarked Hsiao Hung, “she’s waiting for you, and are you still squatting here chatting leisurely? Hadn’t it been that I asked you to go and fetch it, she too wouldn’t have been waiting for you; you most perverse vixen!”

With these words on her lips, she herself walked out of the room, and leaving the I Hung court, she straightway proceeded in the direction of Pao-ch’ai’s court. As soon, however, as she reached the Hsin Fang pavilion, she saw dame Li, Pao-yü‘s nurse, appear in view from the opposite side; so Hsiao Hung halted and putting on a smile, “Nurse Li,” she asked, “where are you, old dame, bound for? How is it you’re coming this way?”

Nurse Li stopped short, and clapped her hands. “Tell me,” she said, “has he deliberately again gone and fallen in love with that Mr. something or other like Yun (cloud), or Yü (rain)? They now insist upon my bringing him inside, but if they get wind of it by and bye in the upper rooms, it won’t again be a nice thing.”

“Are you, old lady,” replied Hsiao Hung smiling, “taking things in such real earnest that you readily believe them and want to go and ask him in here?”

“What can I do?” rejoined nurse Li.

“Why, that fellow,” added Hsiao Hung laughingly, “will, if he has any idea of decency, do the right thing and not come.”

“Besides, he’s not a fool!” pleaded nurse Li; “so why shouldn’t he come in?”

“Well, if he is to come,” answered Hsiao Hung, “it will devolve upon you, worthy dame, to lead him along with you; for were you by and bye to let him penetrate inside all alone and knock recklessly about, why, it won’t do at all.”

“Have I got all that leisure,” retorted nurse Li, “to trudge along with him? I’ll simply tell him to come; and later on I can despatch a young servant-girl or some old woman to bring him in, and have done.”

Saying this, she continued her way, leaning on her staff.

After listening to her rejoinder, Hsiao Hung stood still; and plunging in abstraction, she did not go and fetch the pencil. But presently, she caught sight of a servant-girl running that way. Espying Hsiao Hung lingering in that spot, “Sister Hung,” she cried, “what are you doing in here?”

Hsiao Hung raised her head, and recognised a young waiting-maid called Chui Erh. “Where are you off too?” Hsiao Hung asked.

“I’ve been told to bring in master Secundus, Mr. Yün,” Chui Erh replied. After which answer, she there and then departed with all speed.

Hsiao Hung reached, meanwhile, the Feng Yao bridge. As soon as she approached the gateway, she perceived Chui Erh coming along with Chia Yün from the opposite direction. While advancing Chia Yün ogled Hsiao Hung; and Hsiao Hung too, though pretending to be addressing herself to Chui Erh, cast a glance at Chia Yün; and their four eyes, as luck would have it, met. Hsiao Hung involuntarily blushed all over; and turning herself round, she walked off towards the Heng Wu court. But we will leave her there without further remarks.

During this time, Chia Yün followed Chui Erh, by a circuitous way, into the I Hung court. Chui Erh entered first and made the necessary announcement. Then subsequently she ushered in Chia Yün. When Chia Yün scrutinised the surroundings, he perceived, here and there in the court, several blocks of rockery, among which were planted banana-trees. On the opposite side were two storks preening their feathers under the fir trees. Under the covered passage were suspended, in a row, cages of every description, containing all sorts of fairylike, rare birds. In the upper part were five diminutive anterooms, uniformly carved with, unique designs; and above the framework of the door was hung a tablet with the inscription in four huge characters—“I Hung K’uai Lü, the happy red and joyful green.”

“I thought it strange,” Chia Yün argued mentally, “that it should be called the I Hung court; but are these, in fact, the four characters inscribed on the tablet!”

But while he was communing within himself, he heard some one laugh and then exclaim from the inner side of the gauze window: “Come in at once! How is it that I’ve forgotten you these two or three months?”

As soon as Chia Yün recognised Pao-yü‘s voice, he entered the room with hurried step. On raising his head, his eye was attracted by the brilliant splendour emitted by gold and jade and by the dazzling lustre of the elegant arrangements. He failed, however, to detect where Pao-yü was ensconced. The moment he turned his head round, he espied, on the left side, a large cheval-glass; behind which appeared to view, standing side by side, two servant-girls of fifteen or sixteen years of age. “Master Secundus,” they ventured, “please take a seat in the inner room.”

Chia Yün could not even muster courage to look at them straight in the face; but promptly assenting, he walked into a green gauze mosquito-house, where he saw a small lacquered bed, hung with curtains of a deep red colour, with clusters of flowers embroidered in gold. Pao-yü, wearing a house-dress and slipshod shoes, was reclining on the bed, a book in hand. The moment he perceived Chia Yün walk in, he discarded his book, and forthwith smiled and raised himself up. Chia Yün hurriedly pressed forward and paid his salutation. Pao-yü then offered him a seat; but he simply chose a chair in the lower part of the apartment.

“Ever since the moon in which I came across you,” Pao-yü observed smilingly, “and told you to come into the library, I’ve had, who would have thought it, endless things to continuously attend to, so that I forgot all about you.”

“It’s I, indeed, who lacked good fortune!” rejoined Chia Yün, with a laugh; “particularly so, as it again happened that you, uncle, fell ill. But are you quite right once more?”

“All right!” answered Pao-yü. “I heard that you’ve been put to much trouble and inconvenience on a good number of days!”

“Had I even had any trouble to bear,” added Chia Yün, “it would have been my duty to bear it. But your complete recovery, uncle, is really a blessing to our whole family.”

As he spoke, he discerned a couple of servant-maids come to help him to a cup of tea. But while conversing with Pao-yü, Chia Yün was intent upon scrutinising the girl with slim figure, and oval face, and clad in a silvery-red jacket, a blue

satin waistcoat and a white silk petticoat with narrow pleats.

At the time of Pao-yü‘s illness, Chia Yün had spent a couple of days in the inner apartments, so that he remembered half of the inmates of note, and the moment he set eyes upon this servant-girl he knew that it was Hsi Jen; and that she was in Pao-yü‘s rooms on a different standing to the rest. Now therefore that she brought the tea in herself and that Pao-yü was, besides, sitting by, he rose to his feet with alacrity and put on a smile. “Sister,” he said, “how is it that you are pouring tea for me? I came here to pay uncle a visit; what’s more I’m no stranger, so let me pour it with my own hands!”

“Just you sit down and finish!” Pao-yü interposed; “will you also behave in this fashion with servant-girls?”

“In spite of what you say;” remarked Chia Yün smiling, “they are young ladies attached to your rooms, uncle, and how could I presume to be disorderly in my conduct?”

So saying, he took a seat and drank his tea. Pao-yü then talked to him about trivial and irrelevant matters; and afterwards went on to tell him in whose household the actresses were best, and whose gardens were pretty. He further mentioned to him in whose quarters the servant-girls were handsome, whose banquets were sumptuous, as well as in whose home were to be found strange things, and what family possessed remarkable objects. Chia Yün was constrained to humour him in his conversation; but after a chat, which lasted for some time, he noticed that Pao-yü was somewhat listless, and he promptly stood up and took his leave. And Pao-yü too did not use much pressure to detain him. “Tomorrow, if you have nothing to do, do come over!” he merely observed; after which, he again bade the young waiting-maid, Chui Erh, see him out.

Having left the I Hung court, Chia Yün cast a glance all round; and, realising that there was no one about, he slackened his pace at once, and while proceeding leisurely, he conversed, in a friendly way, with Chui Erh on one thing and another. First and foremost he inquired of her what was her age; and her name. “Of what standing are your father and mother?” he said, “How many years have you been in uncle Pao’s apartments? How much money do you get a month? In all how many girls are there in uncle Pao’s rooms?”

As Chui Erh heard the questions set to her, she readily made suitable reply to

each.

“The one, who was a while back talking to you,” continued Chia Yün, “is called Hsiao Hung, isn’t she?”

“Yes, her name is Hsiao Hung!” replied Chui Erh smiling; “but why do you ask about her?”

“She inquired of you just now about some handkerchief or other,” answered Chia Yün; “well, I’ve picked one up.”

Chui Erh greeted this response with a smile. “Many are the times,” she said; “that she has asked me whether I had seen her handkerchief; but have I got all that leisure to worry my mind about such things? She spoke to me about it again to-day; and she suggested that I should find it for her, and that she would also recompense me. This she told me when we were just now at the entrance of the Heng Wu court, and you too, Mr. Secundus, overheard her, so that I’m not lying. But, dear Mr. Secundus, since you’ve picked it up, give it to me. Do! And I’ll see what she will give me as a reward.”

The truth is that Chia Yün had, the previous moon when he had come into the garden to attend to the planting of trees, picked up a handkerchief, which he conjectured must have been dropped by some inmate of those grounds; but as he was not aware whose it was, he did not consequently presume to act with indiscretion. But on this occasion, he overheard Hsiao Hung make inquiries of Chui Erh on the subject; and concluding that it must belong to her, he felt immeasurably delighted. Seeing, besides, how importunate Chui Erh was, he at once devised a plan within himself, and vehemently producing from his sleeve a handkerchief of his own, he observed, as he turned towards Chui Erh with a smile: “As for giving it to you, I’ll do so; but in the event of your obtaining any present from her, you mustn’t impose upon me.”

Chui Erh assented to his proposal most profusely; and, taking the handkerchief, she saw Chia Yün out and then came back in search of Hsiao Hung. But we will leave her there for the present.

We will now return to Pao-yü. After dismissing Chia Yün, he lay in such complete listlessness on the bed that he betrayed every sign of being half asleep. Hsi Jen walked up to him, and seated herself on the edge of the bed, and pushing him, “What are you about to go to sleep again,” she said. “Would it not do your

languid spirits good if you went out for a bit of a stroll?”

Upon hearing her voice, Pao-yü grasped her hand in his. “I would like to go out,” he smiled, “but I can’t reconcile myself to the separation from you!”

“Get up at once!” laughed Hsi Jen. And as she uttered these words, she pulled Pao-yü up.

“Where can I go?” exclaimed Pao-yü. “I’m quite surfeited with everything.”

“Once out you’ll be all right,” Hsi Jen answered, “but if you simply give way to this languor, you’ll be more than ever sick of everything at heart.”

Pao-yü could not do otherwise, dull and out of sorts though he was, than accede to her importunities. Strolling leisurely out of the door of the room, he amused himself a little with the birds suspended under the verandah; then he wended his steps outside the court, and followed the course of the Hsin Fang stream; but after admiring the golden fish for a time, he espied, on the opposite hillock, two young deer come rushing down as swift as an arrow. What they were up to Pao-yü could not discern; but while abandoning himself to melancholy, he caught sight of Chia Lan, following behind, with a small bow in his hand, and hurrying down hill in pursuit of them.

As soon as he realised that Pao-yü stood ahead of him, he speedily halted. “Uncle Secundus,” he smiled, “are you at home? I imagined you had gone out of doors!”

“You are up to mischief again, eh?” Pao-yü rejoined. “They’ve done nothing to you, and why shoot at them with your arrows?”

“I had no studies to attend to just now, so, being free with nothing to do,” Chia Lan replied laughingly, “I was practising riding and archery.”

“Shut up!” exclaimed Pao-yü. “When are you not engaged in practising?”

Saying this, he continued his way and straightway reached the entrance of a court. Here the bamboo foliage was thick, and the breeze sighed gently. This was the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Pao-yü listlessly rambled in. He saw a bamboo portière hanging down to the ground. Stillness prevailed. Not a human voice fell on the ear. He advanced as far as the window. Noticing that a whiff of subtle scent stole

softly through the green gauze casement, Pao-yü applied his face closely against the frame to peep in, but suddenly he caught the faint sound of a deep sigh and the words: “Day after day my feelings slumber drowsily!” Upon overhearing this exclamation, Pao-yü unconsciously began to feel a prey to inward longings; but casting a second glance, he saw Tai-yü stretching herself on the bed.

“Why is it,” smiled Pao-yü, from outside the window, “that your feelings day after day slumber drowsily?” So saying, he raised the portière and stepped in.

The consciousness that she had not been reticent about her feelings made Tai-yü unwittingly flush scarlet. Taking hold of her sleeve, she screened her face; and, turning her body round towards the inside, she pretended to be fast asleep. Pao-yü drew near her. He was about to pull her round when he saw Tai-yü‘s nurse enter the apartment, followed by two matrons.

“Is Miss asleep?” they said. “If so, we’ll ask her over, when she wakes up.”

As these words were being spoken, Tai-yü eagerly twisted herself round and sat up. “Who’s asleep?” she laughed.

“We thought you were fast asleep, Miss,” smiled the two or three matrons as soon as they perceived Tai-yü get up. This greeting over, they called Tzu Chüan. “Your young mistress,” they said, “has awoke; come in and wait on her!”

While calling her, they quitted the room in a body. Tai-yü remained seated on the bed. Raising her arms, she adjusted her hair, and smilingly she observed to Pao-yü, “When people are asleep, what do you walk in for?”

At the sight of her half-closed starlike eyes and of her fragrant cheeks, suffused with a crimson blush, Pao-yü‘s feelings were of a sudden awakened; so, bending his body, he took a seat on a chair, and asked with a smile: “What were you saying a short while back?”

“I wasn’t saying anything,” Tai-yü replied.

“What a lie you’re trying to ram down my throat!” laughed Pao-yü. “I heard all.”

But in the middle of their colloquy, they saw Tzu Chüan enter. Pao-yü then put on a smiling face. “Tzu Chüan!” he cried, “pour me a cup of your good tea!”

“Where’s the good tea to be had?” Tzu Chüan answered. “If you want good tea, you’d better wait till Hsi Jen comes.”

“Don’t heed him!” interposed Tai-yü. “Just go first and draw me some water.”

“He’s a visitor,” remonstrated Tzu Chüan, “and, of course, I should first pour him a cup of tea, and then go and draw the water.”

With this answer, she started to serve the tea.

“My dear girl,” Pao-yü exclaimed laughingly, “If I could only share the same bridal curtain with your lovable young mistress, would I ever be able (to treat you as a servant) by making you fold the covers and make the beds.”

Lin Tai-yü at once drooped her head. “What are you saying?” she remonstrated.

“What, did I say anything?” smiled Pao-yü.

Tai-yü burst into tears. “You’ve recently,” she observed, “got into a new way. Whatever slang you happen to hear outside you come and tell me. And whenever you read any improper book, you poke your fun at me. What! have I become a laughing-stock for gentlemen!”

As she began to cry, she jumped down from bed, and promptly left the room. Pao-yü was at a loss how to act. So agitated was he that he hastily ran up to her, “My dear cousin,” he pleaded, “I do deserve death; but don’t go and tell any one! If again I venture to utter such kind of language, may blisters grow on my mouth and may my tongue waste away!”

But while appealing to her feelings, he saw Hsi Jen approach him. “Go back at once,” she cried, “and put on your clothes as master wants to see you.”

At the very mention of his father, Pao-yü felt suddenly as if struck by lightning. Regardless of everything and anything, he rushed, as fast as possible, back to his room, and changing his clothes, he came out into the garden. Here he discovered Pei Ming, standing at the second gateway, waiting for him.

“Do you perchance know what he wants me for?” Pao-yü inquired.

“Master, hurry out at once!” Pei Ming replied. “You must, of course, go and see

him. When you get there, you are sure to find out what it's all about."

This said, he urged Pao-yü on, and together they turned past the large pavilion. Pao-yü was, however, still labouring under suspicion, when he heard, from the corner of the wall, a loud outburst of laughter. Upon turning his head round, he caught sight of Hsüeh P'an jump out, clapping his hands. "Hadn't I said that my uncle wanted you?" he laughed. "Would you ever have rushed out with such alacrity?"

Pei Ming also laughed, and fell on his knees. But Pao-yü remained for a long time under the spell of utter astonishment, before he, at length, realised that it was Hsüeh P'au who had inveigled him to come out.

Hsüeh P'an hastily made a salutation and a curtsey, and confessed his fault. He next gave way to entreaties, saying: "Don't punish the young servant, for it is simply I who begged him go."

Pao-yü too had then no other alternative but to smile. "I don't mind your playing your larks on me; but why," he inquired, "did you mention my father? Were I to go and tell my aunt, your mother, to see to the rights and the wrongs of the case, how would you like it?"

"My dear cousin," remarked Hsüeh P'an vehemently, "the primary idea I had in view was to ask you to come out a moment sooner and I forgot to respectfully shun the expression. But by and bye, when you wish to chaff me, just you likewise allude to my father, and we'll thus be square."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pao-yü. "You do more than ever deserve death!!" Then turning again towards Pei Ming, "You ruffian!" he said, "what are you still kneeling for?"

Pei Ming began to bump his head on the ground with vehemence.

"Had it been for anything else," Hsüeh P'an chimed in, "I wouldn't have made bold to disturb you; but it's simply in connection with my birthday which is tomorrow, the third day of the fifth moon. Ch'eng Jih-hsing, who is in that curio shop of ours, unexpectedly brought along, goodness knows where he fished them from, fresh lotus so thick and so long, so mealy and so crisp; melons of this size; and a Siamese porpoise, that long and that big, smoked with cedar, such as is sent as tribute from the kingdom of Siam. Are not these four presents, pray,

rare delicacies? The porpoise is not only expensive, but difficult to get, and that kind of lotus and melon must have cost him no end of trouble to grow! I lost no time in presenting some to my mother, and at once sent some to your old grandmother, and my aunt. But a good many of them still remain now; and were I to eat them all alone, it would, I fear, be more than I deserve; so I concluded, after thinking right and left, that there was, besides myself, only you good enough to partake of some. That is why I specially invite you to taste them. But, as luck would have it, a young singing-boy has also come, so what do you say to you and I having a jolly day of it?"

As they talked, they walked; and, as they walked, they reached the interior of the library. Here they discovered a whole assemblage consisting of Tan Kuang, Ch'eng Jih-hsing, Hu Ch'i-lai, Tan T'ing-jen and others, and the singing-boy as well. As soon as these saw Pao-yü walk in, some paid their respects to him; others inquired how he was; and after the interchange of salutations, tea was drunk. Hsüeh P'an then gave orders to serve the wine. Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than the servant-lads bustled and fussed for a long while laying the table. When at last the necessary arrangements had been completed, the company took their seats.

Pao-yü verily found the melons and lotus of an exceptional description. "My birthday presents have not as yet been sent round," he felt impelled to say, a smile on his lips, "and here I come, ahead of them, to trespass on your hospitality."

"Just so!" retorted Hsüeh P'an, "but when you come tomorrow to congratulate me we'll consider what novel kind of present you can give me."

"I've got nothing that I can give you," rejoined Pao-yü. "As far as money, clothes, eatables and other such articles go, they are not really mine: all I can call my own are such pages of characters that I may write, or pictures that I may draw."

"Your reference to pictures," added Hsüeh P'an smiling, "reminds me of a book I saw yesterday, containing immodest drawings; they were, truly, beautifully done. On the front page there figured also a whole lot of characters. But I didn't carefully look at them; I simply noticed the name of the person, who had executed them. It was, in fact, something or other like Keng Huang. The pictures were, actually, exceedingly good!"

This allusion made Pao-yü exercise his mind with innumerable conjectures.

“Of pictures drawn from past years to the present, I have,” he said, “seen a good many, but I’ve never come across any Keng Huang.”

After considerable thought, he could not repress himself from bursting out laughing. Then asking a servant to fetch him a pencil, he wrote a couple of words on the palm of his hand. This done, he went on to inquire of Hsüeh. P’an: “Did you see correctly that it read Keng Huang?”

“How could I not have seen correctly?” ejaculated Hsüeh P’an.

Pao-yü thereupon unclenched his hand and allowed him to peruse, what was written in it. “Were they possibly these two characters?” he remarked. “These are, in point of fact, not very dissimilar from what Keng Huang look like?”

On scrutinising them, the company noticed the two words T’ang Yin, and they all laughed. “They must, we fancy, have been these two characters!” they cried. “Your eyes, Sir, may, there’s no saying, have suddenly grown dim!”

Hsüeh P’an felt utterly abashed. “Who could have said,” he smiled, “whether they were T’ang Yin or Kuo Yin, (candied silver or fruit silver).”

As he cracked this joke, however, a young page came and announced that Mr. Feng had arrived. Pao-yü concluded that the new comer must be Feng Tzu-ying, the son of Feng T’ang, general with the prefix of Shen Wu.”

“Ask him in at once,” Hsüeh P’an and his companions shouted with one voice.

But barely were these words out of their mouths, than they realised that Feng Tzu-ying had already stepped in, talking and laughing as he approached.

The company speedily rose from table and offered him a seat.

“That’s right!” smiled Feng Tzu-ying. “You don’t go out of doors, but remain at home and go in for high fun!”

Both Pao-yü and Hsüeh P’an put on a smile. “We haven’t,” they remarked, “seen you for ever so long. Is your venerable father strong and hale?”

“My father,” rejoined Tzu-ying, “is, thanks to you, strong and hale; but my mother recently contracted a sudden chill and has been unwell for a couple of days.”

Hsüeh P’an discerned on his face a slight bluish wound. “With whom have you again been boxing,” he laughingly inquired, “that you’ve hung up this sign board?”

“Since the occasion,” laughed Feng Tzu-ying, “on which I wounded lieutenant-colonel Ch’ou’s son, I’ve borne the lesson in mind, and never lost my temper. So how is it you say that I’ve again been boxing? This thing on my face was caused, when I was out shooting the other day on the T’ieh Wang hills, by a flap from the wing of the falcon.”

“When was that?” asked Pao-yü.

“I started,” explained Tzu-ying, “on the 28th of the third moon and came back only the day before yesterday.”

“It isn’t to be wondered at then,” observed Pao-yü, “that when I went the other day, on the third and fourth, to a banquet at friend Shen’s house, I didn’t see you there. Yet I meant to have inquired about you; but I don’t know how it slipped from my memory. Did you go alone, or did your venerable father accompany you?”

“Of course, my father went,” Tzu-ying replied, “so I had no help but to go. For is it likely, forsooth, that I’ve gone mad from lack of anything to do! Don’t we, a goodly number as we are, derive enough pleasure from our wine-bouts and plays that I should go in quest of such kind of fatiguing recreation! But in this instance a great piece of good fortune turned up in evil fortune!”

Hsüeh P’an and his companions noticed that he had finished his tea. “Come along,” they one and all proposed, “and join the banquet; you can then quietly recount to us all your experiences.”

At this suggestion Feng Tzu-ying there and then rose to his feet. “According to etiquette,” he said. “I should join you in drinking a few cups; but to-day I have still a very urgent matter to see my father about on my return so that I truly cannot accept your invitation.”

Hsüeh P’an, Pao-yü and the other young fellows would on no account listen to his excuses. They pulled him vigorously about and would not let him go.

“This is, indeed, strange!” laughed Feng Tzu-ying. “When have you and I had, during all these years, to have recourse to such proceedings! I really am unable to comply with your wishes. But if you do insist upon making me have a drink, well, then bring a large cup and I’ll take two cups full and finish.”

After this rejoinder, the party could not but give in. Hsüeh P’an took hold of the kettle, while Pao-yü grasped the cup, and they poured two large cups full. Feng Tzu-ying stood up and quaffed them with one draught.

“But do, after all,” urged Pao-yü, “finish this thing about a piece of good fortune in the midst of misfortune before you go.”

“To tell you this to-day,” smiled Feng Tzu-ying, “will be no great fun. But for this purpose I intend standing a special entertainment, and inviting you all to come and have a long chat; and, in the second place, I’ve also got a favour to ask of you.”

Saying this, he pushed his way and was going off at once, when Hsüeh P’an interposed. “What you’ve said,” he observed, “has put us more than ever on pins and needles. We cannot brook any delay. Who knows when you will ask us round; so better tell us, and thus avoid keeping people in suspense!”

“The latest,” rejoined Feng Tzu-ying, “in ten days; the earliest in eight.” With this answer he went out of the door, mounted his horse, and took his departure.

The party resumed their seats at table. They had another bout, and then eventually dispersed.

Pao-yü returned into the garden in time to find Hsi Jen thinking with solicitude that he had gone to see Chia Cheng and wondering whether it foreboded good or evil. As soon as she perceived Pao-yü come back in a drunken state, she felt urged to inquire the reason of it all. Pao-yü told her one by one the particulars of what happened.

“People,” added Hsi Jen, “wait for you with lacerated heart and anxious mind, and there you go and make merry; yet you could very well, after all, have sent some one with a message.”

“Didn’t I purpose sending a message?” exclaimed Pao-yü. “Of course, I did! But I failed to do so, as on the arrival of friend Feng, I got so mixed up that the intention vanished entirely from my mind.”

While excusing himself, he saw Pao-ch’ai enter the apartment. “Have you tasted any of our new things?” she asked, a smile curling her lips.

“Cousin,” laughed Pao-yü, “you must have certainly tasted what you’ve got in your house long before us.”

Pao-ch’ai shook her head and smiled. “Yesterday,” she said, “my brother did actually make it a point to ask me to have some; but I had none; I told him to keep them and send them to others, so confident am I that with my mean lot and scanty blessings I little deserve to touch such dainties.”

As she spoke, a servant-girl poured her a cup of tea and brought it to her. While she sipped it, she carried on a conversation on irrelevant matters; which we need not notice, but turn our attention to Lin Tai-yü.

The instant she heard that Chia Cheng had sent for Pao-yü, and that he had not come back during the whole day, she felt very distressed on his account. After supper, the news of Pao-yü‘s return reached her, and she keenly longed to see him and ask him what was up. Step by step she trudged along, when espying Pao-ch’ai going into Pao-yü‘s garden, she herself followed close in her track. But on their arrival at the Hsin Fang bridge, she caught sight of the various kinds of water-fowl, bathing together in the pond, and although unable to discriminate the numerous species, her gaze became so transfixed by their respective variegated and bright plumage and by their exceptional beauty, that she halted. And it was after she had spent some considerable time in admiring them that she repaired at last to the I Hung court. The gate was already closed. Tai-yü, however, lost no time in knocking. But Ch’ing Wen and Pi Hen had, who would have thought it, been having a tiff, and were in a captious mood, so upon unawares seeing Pao-ch’ai step on the scene, Ch’ing Wen at once visited her resentment upon Pao-ch’ai. She was just standing in the court giving vent to her wrongs, shouting: “You’re always running over and seating yourself here, whether you’ve got good reason for doing so or not; and there’s no sleep for us at the third watch, the middle of the night though it be,” when, all of a sudden, she heard some one else calling at the door. Ch’ing Wen was the more moved to anger. Without even asking who it was, she rapidly bawled out: “They’ve all

gone to sleep; you'd better come tomorrow."

Lin Tai-yü was well aware of the natural peculiarities of the waiting-maids, and of their habit of playing practical jokes upon each other, so fearing that the girl in the inner room had failed to recognise her voice, and had refused to open under the misconception that it was some other servant-girl, she gave a second shout in a higher pitch. "It's I!" she cried, "don't you yet open the gate?"

Ch'ing Wen, as it happened, did not still distinguish her voice; and in an irritable strain, she rejoined: "It's no matter who you may be; Mr. Secundus has given orders that no one at all should be allowed to come in."

As these words reached Lin Tai-yü's ear, she unwittingly was overcome with indignation at being left standing outside. But when on the point of raising her voice to ask her one or two things, and to start a quarrel with her; "albeit," she again argued mentally, "I can call this my aunt's house, and it should be just as if it were my own, it's, after all, a strange place, and now that my father and mother are both dead, and that I am left with no one to rely upon, I have for the present to depend upon her family for a home. Were I now therefore to give way to a regular fit of anger with her, I'll really get no good out of it."

While indulging in reflection, tears trickled from her eyes. But just as she was feeling unable to retrace her steps, and unable to remain standing any longer, and quite at a loss what to do, she overheard the sound of jocular language inside, and listening carefully, she discovered that it was, indeed, Pao-yü and Pao-ch'ai. Lin Tai-yü waxed more wroth. After much thought and cogitation, the incidents of the morning flashed unawares through her memory. "It must, in fact," she mused, "be because Pao-yü is angry with me for having explained to him the true reasons. But why did I ever go and tell you? You should, however, have made inquiries before you lost your temper to such an extent with me as to refuse to let me in to-day; but is it likely that we shall not by and bye meet face to face again?"

The more she gave way to thought, the more she felt wounded and agitated; and without heeding the moss, laden with cold dew, the path covered with vegetation, and the chilly blasts of wind, she lingered all alone, under the shadow of the bushes at the corner of the wall, so thoroughly sad and dejected that she broke forth into sobs.

Lin Tai-yü was, indeed, endowed with exceptional beauty and with charms rarely met with in the world. As soon therefore as she suddenly melted into tears, and the birds and rooks roosting on the neighbouring willow boughs and branches of shrubs caught the sound of her plaintive tones, they one and all fell into a most terrific flutter, and, taking to their wings, they flew away to distant recesses, so little were they able to listen with equanimity to such accents. But the spirits of the flowers were, at the time, silent and devoid of feeling, the birds were plunged in dreams and in a state of stupor, so why did they start? A stanza appositely assigns the reason:—

P’in Erh’s mental talents and looks must in the world be rare—. Alone, clasped in a subtle smell, she quits her maiden room. The sound of but one single sob scarcely dies away, And drooping flowers cover the ground and birds fly in dismay.

Lin Tai-yü was sobbing in her solitude, when a creaking noise struck her ear and the door of the court was flung open. Who came out, is not yet ascertained; but, reader, should you wish to know, the next chapter will explain.

CHAPTER XXVII

In the Ti Ts’ui pavilion, Pao-ch’ai diverts herself with the multicoloured butterflies. Over the mound, where the flowers had been interred, Tai-yü bewails their withered bloom.

Lin Tai-yü, we must explain in taking up the thread of our narrative, was disconsolately bathed in tears, when her ear was suddenly attracted by the creak of the court gate, and her eyes by the appearance of Pao-ch’ai beyond the threshold. Pao-yü, Hsi Jen and a whole posse of inmates then walked out. She felt inclined to go up to Pao-yü and ask him a question; but dreading that if she made any inquiries in the presence of such a company, Pao-yü would be put to the blush and placed in an awkward position, she slipped aside and allowed Pao-ch’ai to prosecute her way. And it was only after Pao-yü and the rest of the party had entered and closed the gate behind them that she at last issued from her retreat. Then fixing her gaze steadfastly on the gateway, she dropped a few tears. But inwardly conscious of their utter futility she retraced her footsteps and wended her way back into her apartment. And with heavy heart and despondent spirits, she divested herself of the remainder of her habiliments.

Tzu Chüan and Hsüeh Yen were well aware, from the experience they had reaped in past days, that Lin Tai-yü was, in the absence of anything to occupy her mind, prone to sit and mope, and that if she did not frown her eyebrows, she anyway heaved deep sighs; but they were quite at a loss to divine why she was, with no rhyme or reason, ever so ready to indulge, to herself, in inexhaustible gushes of tears. At first, there were such as still endeavoured to afford her solace; or who, suspecting lest she brooded over the memory of her father and mother, felt home-sick, or aggrieved, through some offence given her, tried by every persuasion to console and cheer her; but, as contrary to all expectations, she subsequently persisted time and again in this dull mood, through each succeeding month and year, people got accustomed to her eccentricities and did not extend to her the least sympathy. Hence it was that no one (on this occasion) troubled her mind about her, but letting her sit and sulk to her heart’s content, they one and all turned in and went to sleep.

Lin Tai-yü leaned against the railing of the bed, clasping her knees with both hands, her eyes suffused with tears. She looked, in very truth, like a carved wooden image or one fashioned of mud. There she sat straight up to the second watch, even later, when she eventually fell asleep.

The whole night nothing remarkable transpired. The morrow was the 26th day of the fourth moon. Indeed on this day, at one p.m., commenced the season of the ‘Sprouting seeds,’ and, according to an old custom, on the day on which this feast of ‘Sprouting seeds’ fell, every one had to lay all kinds of offerings and sacrificial viands on the altar of the god of flowers. Soon after the expiry of this season of ‘Sprouting seeds’ follows summertide, and us plants in general then wither and the god of flowers resigns his throne, it is compulsory to feast him at some entertainment, previous to his departure.

In the ladies’ apartments this custom was observed with still more rigour; and, for this reason, the various inmates Of the park of Broad Vista had, without a single exception, got up at an early hour. The young people either twisted flowers and willow twigs in such a way as to represent chairs and horses, or made tufted banners with damask, brocaded gauze and silk, and bound them with variegated threads. These articles of decoration were alike attached on every tree and plant; and throughout the whole expanse of the park, embroidered sashes waved to and fro, and ornamented branches nodded their heads about. In addition to this, the members of the family were clad in such fineries that they put the peach tree to shame, made the almond yield the palm, the swallow envious and the hawk to blush. We could not therefore exhaustively describe them within our limited space of time.

Pao-ch’ai, Ying Ch’un, T’an Ch’un, Hsi Ch’un, Li Wan, lady Feng and other girls, as well as Ta Chieh Erh, Hsiang Ling and the waiting-maids were, one and all, we will now notice, in the garden enjoying themselves; the only person who could not be seen was Lin Tai-yü.

“How is it,” consequently inquired Ying Ch’un, “that I don’t see cousin Liu? What a lazy girl! Is she forsooth fast asleep even at this late hour of the day?”

“Wait all of you here,” rejoined Pao-ch’ai, “and I’ll go and shake her up and bring her.”

With these words, she speedily left her companions and repaired straightway into

the Hsiao Hsiang lodge.

While she was going on her errand, she met Wen Kuan and the rest of the girls, twelve in all, on their way to seek the party. Drawing near, they inquired after her health. After exchanging a few commonplace remarks, Pao-ch'ai turned round and pointing, said: "you will find them all in there; you had better go and join them. As for me, I'm going to fetch Miss Lin, but I'll be back soon."

Saying this, she followed the winding path, and came to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Upon suddenly raising her eyes, she saw Pao-yü walk in. Pao-ch'ai immediately halted, and, lowering her head, she gave way to meditation for a time. "Pao-yü and Lin Tai-yü," she reflected, "have grown up together from their very infancy. But cousins, though they be, there are many instances in which they cannot evade suspicion, for they joke without heeding propriety; and at one time they are friends and at another at daggers drawn. Tai-yü has, moreover, always been full of envy; and has ever displayed a peevish disposition, so were I to follow him in at this juncture, why, Pao-yü would, in the first place, not feel at ease, and, in the second, Tai-yü would give way to jealousy. Better therefore for me to turn back."

At the close of this train of thought, she retraced her steps. But just as she was starting to join her other cousins, she unexpectedly descried, ahead of her, a pair of jade-coloured butterflies, of the size of a circular fan. Now they soared high, now they made a swoop down, in their flight against the breeze; much to her amusement.

Pao-ch'ai felt a wish to catch them for mere fun's sake, so producing a fan from inside her sleeve, she descended on to the turfed ground to flap them with it. The two butterflies suddenly were seen to rise; suddenly to drop: sometimes to come; at others to go. Just as they were on the point of flying across the stream to the other side, the enticement proved too much for Pao-ch'ai, and she pursued them on tiptoe straight up to the Ti Ts'ui pavilion, nestling on the bank of the pond; while fragrant perspiration dripped drop by drop, and her sweet breath panted gently. But Pao-ch'ai abandoned the idea of catching them, and was about to beat a retreat, when all at once she overheard, in the pavilion, the chatter of people engaged in conversation.

This pavilion had, it must be added, a verandah and zig-zag balustrades running all round. It was erected over the water, in the centre of a pond, and had on the

four sides window-frames of carved wood work, stuck with paper. So when Pao-ch'ai caught, from without the pavilion, the sound of voices, she at once stood still and lent an attentive ear to what was being said.

"Look at this handkerchief," she overheard. "If it's really the one you've lost, well then keep it; but if it isn't you must return it to Mr. Yün."

"To be sure it is my own," another party observed, "bring it along and give it to me."

"What reward will you give me?" she further heard. "Is it likely that I've searched all for nothing!"

"I've long ago promised to recompense you, and of course I won't play you false," some one again rejoined.

"I found it and brought it round," also reached her ear, "and you naturally will recompense me; but won't you give anything to the person who picked it up?"

"Don't talk nonsense," the other party added, "he belongs to a family of gentlemen, and anything of ours he may pick up it's his bounden duty to restore to us. What reward could you have me give him?"

"If you don't reward him," she heard some one continue, "what will I be able to tell him? Besides, he enjoined me time after time that if there was to be no recompense, I was not to give it to you."

A short pause ensued. "Never mind!" then came out again to her, "take this thing of mine and present it to him and have done! But do you mean to let the cat out of the bag with any one else? You should take some oath."

"If I tell any one," she likewise overheard, "may an ulcer grow on my mouth, and may I, in course of time, die an unnatural death!"

"Ai-ya!" was the reply she heard; "our minds are merely bent upon talking, but some one might come and quietly listen from outside; wouldn't it be as well to push all the venetians open. Any one seeing us in here will then imagine that we are simply chatting about nonsense. Besides, should they approach, we shall be able to observe them, and at once stop our conversation!"

Pao-ch’ai listened to these words from outside, with a heart full of astonishment. “How can one wonder,” she argued mentally, “if all those lewd and dishonest people, who have lived from olden times to the present, have devised such thorough artifices! But were they now to open and see me here, won’t they feel ashamed. Moreover, the voice in which those remarks were uttered resembles very much that of Hung Erh, attached to Pao-yü‘s rooms, who has all along shown a sharp eye and a shrewd mind. She’s an artful and perverse thing of the first class! And as I have now overheard her peccadilloes, and a person in despair rebels as sure as a dog in distress jumps over the wall, not only will trouble arise, but I too shall derive no benefit. It would be better at present therefore for me to lose no time in retiring. But as I fear I mayn’t be in time to get out of the way, the only alternative for me is to make use of some art like that of the cicada, which can divest itself of its *exuviae*.”

She had scarcely brought her reflections to a close before a sound of ‘ko-chih’ reached her ears. Pao-ch’ai purposely hastened to tread with heavy step. “P’in Erh, I see where you’re hiding!” she cried out laughingly; and as she shouted, she pretended to be running ahead in pursuit of her.

As soon as Hsiao Hung and Chui Erh pushed the windows open from inside the pavilion, they heard Pao-ch’ai screaming, while rushing forward; and both fell into a state of trepidation from the fright they sustained.

Pao-ch’ai turned round and faced them. “Where have you been hiding Miss Lin?” she smiled.

“Who has seen anything of Miss Lin,” retorted Chui Erh.

“I was just now,” proceeded Pao-ch’ai, “on that side of the pool, and discerned Miss Lin squatting down over there and playing with the water. I meant to have gently given her a start, but scarcely had I walked up to her, when she saw me, and, with a *detour* towards the East, she at once vanished from sight. So mayn’t she be concealing herself in there?”

As she spoke, she designedly stepped in and searched about for her. This over, she betook herself away, adding: “she’s certain to have got again into that cave in the hill, and come across a snake, which must have bitten her and put an end to her.”

So saying, she distanced them, feeling again very much amused. “I have

managed," she thought, "to ward off this piece of business, but I wonder what those two think about it."

Hsiao Hung, who would have anticipated, readily credited as gospel the remarks she heard Pao-ch'ai make. But allowing just time enough to Pao-ch'ai to got to a certain distance, she instantly drew Chui Erh to her. "Dreadful!" she observed, "Miss Lin was squatting in here and must for a certainty have overheard what we said before she left."

Albeit Chui Erh listened to her words, she kept her own counsel for a long time. "What's to be done?" Hsiao Hung consequently exclaimed.

"Even supposing she did overhear what we said," rejoined Chui Erh by way of answer, "why should she meddle in what does not concern her? Every one should mind her own business."

"Had it been Miss Pao, it would not have mattered," remarked Hsiao Hung, "but Miss Lin delights in telling mean things of people and is, besides, so petty-minded. Should she have heard and anything perchance comes to light, what will we do?"

During their colloquy, they noticed Wen Kuan, Hsiang Ling, Ssu Ch'i, Shih Shu and the other girls enter the pavilion, so they were compelled to drop the conversation and to play and laugh with them. They then espied lady Feng standing on the top of the hillock, waving her hand, beckoning to Hsiao Hung. Hurriedly therefore leaving the company, she ran up to lady Feng and with smile heaped upon smile, "my lady," she inquired, "what is it that you want?"

Lady Feng scrutinised her for a time. Observing how spruce and pretty she was in looks, and how genial in her speech, she felt prompted to give her a smile. "My own waiting-maid," she said, "hasn't followed me in here to-day; and as I've just this moment bethought myself of something and would like to send some one on an errand, I wonder whether you're fit to undertake the charge and deliver a message faithfully."

"Don't hesitate in entrusting me with any message you may have to send," replied Hsiao Hung with a laugh. "I'll readily go and deliver it. Should I not do so faithfully, and blunder in fulfilling your business, my lady, you may visit me with any punishment your ladyship may please, and I'll have nothing to say."

“What young lady’s servant are you,” smiled lady Feng? “Tell me, so that when she comes back, after I’ve sent you out, and looks for you, I may be able to tell her about you.”

“I’m attached to our Master Secundus,’ Mr. Pao’s rooms,” answered Hsiao Hung.

“Ai-ya!” ejaculated lady Feng, as soon as she heard these words. “Are you really in Pao-yü‘s rooms! How strange! Yet it comes to the same thing. Well, if he asks for you, I’ll tell him where you are. Go now to our house and tell your sister P’ing that she’ll find on the table in the outer apartment and under the stand with the plate from the Ju kiln, a bundle of silver; that it contains the one hundred and twenty taels for the embroiderers’ wages; and that when Chang Ts’ai’s wife comes, the money should be handed to her to take away, after having been weighed in her presence and been given to her to tally. Another thing too I want. In the inner apartment and at the head of the bed you’ll find a small purse, bring it along to me.”

Hsiao Hung listened to her orders and then started to carry them out. On her return, in a short while, she discovered that lady Feng was not on the hillock. But perceiving Ssu Ch’i egress from the cave and stand still to tie her petticoat, she walked up to her. “Sister, do you know where our lady Secunda is gone to?” she asked.

“I didn’t notice,” rejoined Ssu Ch’i.

At this reply, Hsiao Hung turned round and cast a glance on all four quarters. Seeing T’an Ch’un and Pao-ch’ai standing by the bank of the pond on the opposite side and looking at the fish, Hsiao Hung advanced up to them. “Young ladies,” she said, straining a smile, “do you perchance have any idea where our lady Secunda is gone to now?”

“Go into your senior lady’s court and look for her!” T’an Ch’un answered.

Hearing this, Hsiao Hung was proceeding immediately towards the Tao Hsiang village, when she caught sight, just ahead of her, of Ch’ing Wen, Ch’i Hsia, Pi Hen, Ch’iu Wen, She Yüeh, Shih Shu, Ju Hua, Ying Erh and some other girls coming towards her in a group.

The moment Ch’ing Wen saw Hsiao Hung, she called out to her. “Are you gone

clean off your head?" she exclaimed. "You don't water the flowers, nor feed the birds or prepare the tea stove, but gad about outside!"

"Yesterday," replied Hsiao Hung, "Mr. Secundus told me that there was no need for me to water the flowers to-day; that it was enough if they were watered every other day. As for the birds, you're still in the arms of Morpheus, sister, when I give them their food."

"And what about the tea-stove?" interposed Pi Hen.

"To-day," retorted Hsiao Hung, "is not my turn on duty, so don't ask me whether there be any tea or not!"

"Do you listen to that mouth of hers!" cried Ch'i Hsia, "but don't you girls speak to her; let her stroll about and have done!"

"You'd better all go and ask whether I've been gadding about or not," continued Hsiao Hung. "Our lady Secunda has just bidden me go and deliver a message, and fetch something."

Saying this, she raised the purse and let them see it; and they, finding they could hit upon nothing more to taunt her with, trudged along onwards.

Ch'ing Wen smiled a sarcastic smile. "How funny!" she cried. "Lo, she climbs up a high branch and doesn't condescend to look at any one of us! All she told her must have been just some word or two, who knows! But is it likely that our lady has the least notion of her name or surname that she rides such a high horse, and behaves in this manner! What credit is it in having been sent on a trifling errand like this! Will we, by and bye, pray, hear anything more about you? If you've got any gumption, you'd better skedaddle out of this garden this very day. For, mind, it's only if you manage to hold your lofty perch for any length of time that you can be thought something of!"

As she derided her, she continued on her way.

During this while, Hsiao Hung listened to her, but as she did not find it a suitable moment to retaliate, she felt constrained to suppress her resentment and go in search of lady Feng.

On her arrival at widow Li's quarters, she, in point of fact, discovered lady Feng

seated inside with her having a chat. Hsiao Hung approached her and made her report. “Sister P’ing says,” she observed, “that as soon as your ladyship left the house, she put the money by, and that when Chang Ts’ai’s wife went in a little time to fetch it, she had it weighed in her presence, after which she gave it to her to take away.”

With these words, she produced the purse and presented it to her. “Sister P’ing bade me come and tell your ladyship,” she added, continuing, “that Wang Erh came just now to crave your orders, as to who are the parties from whom he has to go and (collect interest on money due) and sister P’ing explained to him what your wishes were and sent him off.”

“How could she tell him where I wanted him to go?” Lady Feng laughed.

“Sister P’ing says,” Hsiao Hung proceeded, “that our lady presents her compliments to your ladyship (widow Li) here-(_To lady Feng_) that our master Secundus has in fact not come home, and that albeit a delay of (a day) or two will take place (in the collection of the money), your ladyship should, she begs, set your mind at ease. (_To Li Wan_). That when lady Quinta is somewhat better, our lady will let lady Quinta know and come along with her to see your ladyship. (_To lady Feng_). That lady Quinta sent a servant the day before yesterday to come over and say that our lady, your worthy maternal aunt, had despatched a letter to inquire after your ladyship’s health; that she also wished to ask you, my lady, her worthy niece in here, for a couple of ‘long-life-great-efficacy-full-of-every-virtue’ pills; and that if you have any, they should, when our lady bids a servant come over, be simply given her to bring to our lady here, and that any one bound tomorrow for that side could then deliver them on her way to her ladyship, your aunt yonder, to take along with her.”

“Ai-yo-yo!” exclaimed widow Li, before the close of the message. “It’s impossible for me to make out what you’re driving at! What a heap of ladyships and misters!”

“It’s not to be wondered at that you can’t make them out,” interposed lady Feng laughing. “Why, her remarks refer to four or five distinct families.”

While speaking, she again faced Hsiao Hung. “My dear girl,” she smiled, “what a trouble you’ve been put to! But you speak decently, and unlike the others who keep on buzz-buzz-buzz, like mosquitoes! You’re not aware, sister-in-law, that I

actually dread uttering a word to any of the girls outside the few servant-girls and matrons in my own immediate service; for they invariably spin out, what could be condensed in a single phrase, into a long interminable yarn, and they munch and chew their words; and sticking to a peculiar drawl, they groan and moan; so much so, that they exasperate me till I fly into a regular rage. Yet how are they to know that our P'ing Erh too was once like them. But when I asked her: 'must you forsooth imitate the humming of a mosquito, in order to be accounted a handsome girl?' and spoke to her, on several occasions, she at length improved considerably."

"What a good thing it would be," laughed Li Kung-ts'ai, "if they could all be as smart as you are."

"This girl is first-rate!" rejoined lady Feng, "she just now delivered two messages. They didn't, I admit, amount to much, yet to listen to her, she spoke to the point."

"Tomorrow," she continued, addressing herself to Hsiao Hung smilingly, "come and wait on me, and I'll acknowledge you as my daughter; and the moment you come under my control, you'll readily improve."

At this news, Hsiao Hung spurted out laughing aloud.

"What are you laughing for?" Lady Feng inquired. "You must say to yourself that I am young in years and that how much older can I be than yourself to become your mother; but are you under the influence of a spring dream? Go and ask all those people older than yourself. They would be only too ready to call me mother. But snapping my fingers at them, I to-day exalt you."

"I wasn't laughing about that," Hsiao Hung answered with a smiling face. "I was amused by the mistake your ladyship made about our generations. Why, my mother claims to be your daughter, my lady, and are you now going to recognise me too as your daughter?"

"Who's your mother?" Lady Feng exclaimed.

"Don't you actually know her?" put in Li Kung-ts'ai with a smile. "She's Lin Chih-hsiao's child."

This disclosure greatly surprised lady Feng. "What!" she consequently cried, "is

she really his daughter?”

“Why Lin Chih-hsiao and his wife,” she resumed smilingly, “couldn’t either of them utter a sound if even they were pricked with an awl. I’ve always maintained that they’re a well-suited couple; as the one is as deaf as a post, and the other as dumb as a mute. But who would ever have expected them to have such a clever girl! By how much are you in your teens?”

“I’m seventeen,” replied Hsia Hung.

“What is your name?” she went on to ask.

“My name was once Hung Yü.” Hsiao Hung rejoined. “But as it was a duplicate of that of Master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, I’m now simply called Hsiao Hung.”

Upon hearing this explanation, lady Feng raised her eyebrows into a frown, and turning her head round: “It’s most disgusting!” she remarked, “Those bearing the name Yü would seem to be very cheap; for your name is Yü, and so is also mine Yü. Sister-in-law,” she then observed; “I never let you know anything about it, but I mentioned to her mother that Lai Ta’s wife has at present her hands quite full, and that she hasn’t either any notion as to who is who in this mansion. ‘You had better,’ (I said), ‘carefully select a couple of girls for my service.’ She assented unreservedly, but she put it off and never chose any. On the contrary, she sent this girl to some other place. But is it likely that she wouldn’t have been well off with me?”

“Here you are again full of suspicion!” Li Wan laughed. “She came in here long before you ever breathed a word to her! So how could you bear a grudge against her mother?”

“Well, in that case,” added lady Feng, “I’ll speak to Pao-yü tomorrow, and induce him to find another one, and to allow this girl to come along with me. I wonder, however, whether she herself is willing or not?”

“Whether willing or not,” interposed Hsiao Hung smiling, “such as we couldn’t really presume to raise our voices and object. We should feel it our privilege to serve such a one as your ladyship, and learn a little how to discriminate when people raise or drop their eyebrows and eyes (with pleasure or displeasure), and reap as well some experience in such matters as go out or come in, whether high or low, great and small.”

But during her reply, she perceived Madame Wang's waiting-maid come and invite lady Feng to go over. Lady Feng bade goodbye at once to Li Kung-ts'ai and took her departure.

Hsiao Hung then returned into the I Hung court, where we will leave her and devote our attention for the present to Lin Tai-yü.

As she had had but little sleep in the night, she got up the next day at a late hour. When she heard that all her cousins were collected in the park, giving a farewell entertainment for the god of flowers, she hastened, for fear people should laugh at her for being lazy, to comb her hair, perform her ablutions, and go out and join them. As soon as she reached the interior of the court, she caught sight of Pao-yü, entering the door, who speedily greeted her with a smile. "My dear cousin," he said, "did you lodge a complaint against me yesterday? I've been on pins and needles the whole night long."

Tai-yü forthwith turned her head away. "Put the room in order," she shouted to Tzu Chüan, "and lower one of the gauze window-frames. And when you've seen the swallows come back, drop the curtain; keep it down then by placing the lion on it, and after you have burnt the incense, mind you cover the censer."

So saying she stepped outside.

Pao-yü perceiving her manner, concluded again that it must be on account of the incident of the previous noon, but how could he have had any idea about what had happened in the evening? He kept on still bowing and curtseying; but Lin Tai-yü did not even so much as look at him straight in the face, but egressing alone out of the door of the court, she proceeded there and then in search of the other girls.

Pao-yü fell into a despondent mood and gave way to conjectures.

"Judging," he reflected, "from this behaviour of hers, it would seem as if it could not be for what transpired yesterday. Yesterday too I came back late in the evening, and, what's more, I didn't see her, so that there was no occasion on which I could have given her offence."

As he indulged in these reflections, he involuntarily followed in her footsteps to try and catch her up, when he descried Pao-ch'ai and T'an-ch'un on the opposite side watching the frolics of the storks.

As soon as they saw Tai-yü approach, the trio stood together and started a friendly chat. But noticing Pao-yü also come up, T'an Ch'un smiled. "Brother Pao," she said, "are you all right. It's just three days that I haven't seen anything of you?"

"Are you sister quite well?" Pao-yü rejoined, a smile on his lips. "The other day, I asked news of you of our senior sister-in-law."

"Brother Pao," T'an Ch'un remarked, "come over here; I want to tell you something."

The moment Pao-yü heard this, he quickly went with her. Distancing Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü, the two of them came under a pomegranate tree. "Has father sent for you these last few days?" T'an Ch'un then asked.

"He hasn't," Pao-yü answered laughingly by way of reply.

"Yesterday," proceeded T'an Ch'un, "I heard vaguely something or other about father sending for you to go out."

"I presume," Pao-yü smiled, "that some one must have heard wrong, for he never sent for me."

"I've again managed to save during the last few months," added T'an Ch'un with another smile, "fully ten tiaos, so take them and bring me, when at any time you stroll out of doors, either some fine writings or some ingenious knicknack."

"Much as I have roamed inside and outside the city walls," answered Pao-yü, "and seen grand establishments and large temples, I've never come across anything novel or pretty. One simply sees articles made of gold, jade, copper and porcelain, as well as such curios for which we could find no place here. Besides these, there are satins, eatables, and wearing apparel."

"Who cares for such baubles!" exclaimed T'an Ch'un. "How could they come up to what you purchased the last time; that wee basket, made of willow twigs, that scent-box, scooped out of a root of real bamboo, that portable stove fashioned of glutinous clay; these things were, oh, so very nice! I was as fond of them as I don't know what; but, who'd have thought it, they fell in love with them and bundled them all off, just as if they were precious things."

“Is it things of this kind that you really want?” laughed Pao-yü. “Why, these are worth nothing! Were you to take a hundred cash and give them to the servant-boys, they could, I’m sure, bring two cartloads of them.”

“What do the servant-boys know?” T’an Ch’un replied. “Those you chose for me were plain yet not commonplace. Neither were they of coarse make. So were you to procure me as many as you can get of them, I’ll work you a pair of slippers like those I gave you last time, and spend twice as much trouble over them as I did over that pair you have. Now, what do you say to this bargain?”

“Your reference to this,” smiled Pao-yü, “reminds me of an old incident. One day I had them on, and by a strange coincidence, I met father, whose fancy they did not take, and he inquired who had worked them. But how could I muster up courage to allude to the three words: my sister Tertia, so I answered that my maternal aunt had given them to me on the recent occasion of my birthday. When father heard that they had been given to me by my aunt, he could not very well say anything. But after a while, ‘why uselessly waste,’ he observed, ‘human labour, and throw away silks to make things of this sort!’ On my return, I told Hsi Jen about it. ‘Never mind,’ said Hsi Jen; but Mrs. Chao got angry. ‘Her own brother,’ she murmured indignantly, ‘wears slipshod shoes and socks in holes, and there’s no one to look after him, and does she go and work all these things!’”

T’an Ch’un, hearing this, immediately lowered her face. “Now tell me, aren’t these words utter rot!” she shouted. “What am I that I have to make shoes? And is it likely that Huan Erh hasn’t his own share of things! Clothes are clothes, and shoes and socks are shoes and socks; and how is it that any grudges arise in the room of a mere servant-girl and old matron? For whose benefit does she come out with all these things! I simply work a pair or part of a pair when I am at leisure, with time on my hands. And I can give them to any brother, elder or younger, I fancy; and who has a right to interfere with me? This is just another bit of blind anger!”

After listening to her, Pao-yü nodded his head and smiled. “Yet,” he said, “you don’t know what her motives may be. It’s but natural that she should also cherish some expectations.”

This apology incensed T’an Ch’un more than ever, and twisting her head round, “Even you have grown dull!” she cried. “She does, of course, indulge in expectations, but they are actuated by some underhand and paltry notion! She

may go on giving way to these ideas, but I, for my part, will only care for Mr. Chia Cheng and Madame Wang. I won't care a rap for any one else. In fact, I'll be nice with such of my sisters and brothers, as are nice to me; and won't even draw any distinction between those born of primary wives and those of secondary ones. Properly speaking, I shouldn't say these things about her, but she's narrowminded to a degree, and unlike what she should be. There's besides another ridiculous thing. This took place the last time I gave you the money to get me those trifles. Well, two days after that, she saw me, and she began again to represent that she had no money and that she was hard up. Nevertheless, I did not worry my brain with her goings on. But as it happened, the servant-girls subsequently quitted the room, and she at once started finding fault with me. 'Why,' she asked, 'do I give you my savings to spend and don't, after all, let Huan Erh have them and enjoy them?' When I heard these reproaches, I felt both inclined to laugh, and also disposed to lose my temper; but I there and then skedaddled out of her quarters, and went over to our Madame Wang."

As she was recounting this incident, "Well," she overheard Pao-ch'ai sarcastically observe from the opposite direction, "have you done spinning your yarns? If you have, come along! It's quite evident that you are brother and sister, for here you leave every one else and go and discuss your own private matters. Couldn't we too listen to a single sentence of what you have to say?"

While she taunted them, T'an Ch'un and Pao-yü eventually drew near her with smiling faces.

Pao-yü, however, failed to see Lin Tai-yü and he concluded that she had dodged out of the way and gone elsewhere. "It would be better," he muttered, after some thought, "that I should let two days elapse, and give her temper time to evaporate before I go to her." But as he drooped his head, his eye was attracted by a heap of touch-me-nots, pomegranate blossom and various kinds of fallen flowers, which covered the ground thick as tapestry, and he heaved a sigh. "It's because," he pondered, "she's angry that she did not remove these flowers; but I'll take them over to the place, and by and bye ask her about them."

As he argued to himself, he heard Pao-ch'ai bid them go out. "I'll join you in a moment," Pao-yü replied; and waiting till his two cousins had gone some distance, he bundled the flowers into his coat, and ascending the hill, he crossed the stream, penetrated into the arbour, passed through the avenues with flowers and wended his way straight for the spot, where he had, on a previous occasion,

interred the peach-blossoms with the assistance of Lin Tai-yü. But scarcely had he reached the mound containing the flowers, and before he had, as yet, rounded the brow of the hill, than he caught, emanating from the off side, the sound of some one sobbing, who while giving way to invective, wept in a most heart-rending way.

“I wonder,” soliloquised Pao-yü, “whose servant-girl this is, who has been so aggrieved as to run over here to have a good cry!”

While speculating within himself, he halted. He then heard, mingled with wails: —

Flowers wither and decay; and flowers do fleet; they fly all o’er the skies; Their bloom wanes; their smell dies; but who is there with them to sympathise? While vagrant gossamer soft doth on fluttering spring-bowers bind its coils, And drooping catkins lightly strike and cling on the embroidered screens, A maiden in the inner rooms, I sore deplore the close of spring. Such ceaseless sorrow fills my breast, that solace nowhere can I find. Past the embroidered screen I issue forth, taking with me a hoe, And on the faded flowers to tread I needs must, as I come and go. The willow fibres and elm seeds have each a fragrance of their own. What care I, peach blossoms may fall, pear flowers away be blown; Yet peach and pear will, when next year returns, burst out again in bloom, But can it e’er be told who will next year dwell in the inner room? What time the third moon comes, the scented nests have been already built. And on the beams the swallows perch, excessive spiritless and staid; Next year, when the flowers bud, they may, it’s true, have ample to feed on: But they know not that when I’m gone beams will be vacant and nests fall! In a whole year, which doth consist of three hundred and sixty days, Winds sharp as swords and frost like unto spears each other rigorous press, So that how long can last their beauty bright; their fresh charm how long stays? Sudden they droop and fly; and whither they have flown, ‘tis hard to guess. Flowers, while in bloom, easy the eye attract; but, when they wither, hard they are to find. Now by the footsteps, I bury the flowers, but sorrow will slay me. Alone I stand, and as I clutch the hoe, silent tears trickle down, And drip on the bare twigs, leaving behind them the traces of blood. The goatsucker hath sung his song, the shades lower of eventide, So with the lotus hoe I return home and shut the double doors. Upon the wall the green lamp sheds its rays just as I go to sleep. The cover is yet cold; against the window patters the bleak rain. How strange! Why can it ever be that I feel so wounded at heart! Partly, because spring I regret; partly, because with spring I’m vexed! Regret for

spring, because it sudden comes; vexed, for it sudden goes. For without warning, lo! it comes; and without asking it doth fleet. Yesterday night, outside the hall sorrowful songs burst from my mouth, For I found out that flowers decay, and that birds also pass away. The soul of flowers, and the spirit of birds are both hard to restrain. Birds, to themselves when left, in silence plunge; and flowers, alone, they blush. Oh! would that on my sides a pair of wings could grow, That to the end of heaven I may fly in the wake of flowers! Yea to the very end of heaven, Where I could find a fragrant grave! For better, is it not, that an embroidered bag should hold my well-shaped bones, And that a heap of stainless earth should in its folds my winsome charms enshroud. For spotless once my frame did come, and spotless again it will go! Far better than that I, like filthy mire, should sink into some drain! Ye flowers are now faded and gone, and, lo, I come to bury you. But as for me, what day I shall see death is not as yet divined! Here I am fain these flowers to inter; but humankind will laugh me as a fool. Who knows, who will, in years to come, commit me to my grave! Mark, and you'll find the close of spring, and the gradual decay of flowers, Resemble faithfully the time of death of maidens ripe in years! In a twinkle, spring time draws to a close, and maidens wax in age. Flowers fade and maidens die; and of either nought any more is known.

After listening to these effusions, Pao-yü unconsciously threw himself down in a wandering frame of mind.

But, reader, do you feel any interest in him? If you do, the subsequent chapter contains further details about him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Chiang Yü-han lovingly presents a rubia-scented silk sash. Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai blushingly covers her musk-perfumed string of red beads.

Lin Tai-yü, the story goes, dwelt, after Ch'ing Wen's refusal, the previous night, to open the door, under the impression that the blame lay with Pao-yü. The following day, which by another remarkable coincidence, happened to correspond with the season, when the god of flowers had to be feasted, her total ignorance of the true circumstances, and her resentment, as yet unspent, aroused

again in her despondent thoughts, suggested by the decline of spring time. She consequently gathered a quantity of faded flowers and fallen petals, and went and interred them. Unable to check the emotion, caused by the decay of the flowers, she spontaneously recited, after giving way to several loud lamentations, those verses which Pao-yü, she little thought, overheard from his position on the mound. At first, he did no more than nod his head and heave sighs, full of feeling. But when subsequently his ear caught:

"Here I am fain these flowers to inter, but humankind will laugh me as a fool; Who knows who will, in years to come, commit me to my grave! In a twinkle springtime draws to an end, and maidens wax in age. Flowers fade and maidens die; and of either naught any more is known."

he unconsciously was so overpowered with grief that he threw himself on the mound, bestrewing the whole ground with the fallen flowers he carried in his coat, close to his chest. "When Tai-yü's flowerlike charms and moonlike beauty," he reflected, "by and bye likewise reach a time when they will vanish beyond any hope of recovery, won't my heart be lacerated and my feelings be mangled! And extending, since Tai-yü must at length some day revert to a state when it will be difficult to find her, this reasoning to other persons, like Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling, Hsi Jen and the other girls, they too are equally liable to attain a state beyond the reach of human search. But when Pao-ch'ai and all the rest have ultimately reached that stage when no trace will be visible of them, where shall I myself be then? And when my own human form will have vanished and gone, whither I know not yet, to what person, I wonder, will this place, this garden and these plants, revert?"

From one to a second, and from a second to a third, he thus pursued his reflections, backwards and forwards, until he really did not know how he could best, at this time and at such a juncture, dispel his fit of anguish. His state is adequately described by:

The shadow of a flower cannot err from the flower itself to the left or the right. The song of birds can only penetrate into the ear from the east or the west.

Lin Tai-yü was herself a prey to emotion and agitation, when unawares sorrowful accents also struck her ear, from the direction of the mound. "Every one," she cogitated, "laughs at me for labouring under a foolish mania, but is there likely another fool besides myself?" She then raised her head, and, casting

a glance about her, she discovered that it was Pao-yü. “Ts’ui!” eagerly cried Tai-yü, “I was wondering who it was; but is it truly this ruthless-hearted and short-lived fellow!”

But the moment the two words “short-lived” dropped from her mouth, she sealed her lips; and, heaving a deep sigh, she turned herself round and hurriedly walked off.

Pao-yü, meanwhile, remained for a time a prey to melancholy. But perceiving that Tai-yü had retired, he at once realised that she must have caught sight of him and got out of his way; and, as his own company afforded him no pleasure, he shook the dust off his clothes, rose to his feet and descending the hill, he started for the I Hung court by the path by which he had come. But he espied Tai-yü walking in advance of him, and with rapid stride, he overtook her. “Stop a little!” he cried. “I know you don’t care a rap for me; but I’ll just make one single remark, and from this day forward we’ll part company.”

Tai-yü looked round. Observing that it was Pao-yü, she was about to ignore him; hearing him however mention that he had only one thing to say, “Please tell me what it is,” she forthwith rejoined.

Pao-yü smiled at her. “If I pass two remarks will you listen to me; yes or no?” he asked.

At these words, Tai-yü twisted herself round and beat a retreat. Pao-yü however followed behind.

“Since this is what we’ve come to now,” he sighed, “what was the use of what existed between us in days gone by?”

As soon as Tai-yü heard his exclamation, she stopped short impulsively. Turning her face towards him, “what about days gone by,” she remarked, “and what about now?”

“Ai!” ejaculated Pao-yü, “when you got here in days gone by, wasn’t I your playmate in all your romps and in all your fun? My heart may have been set upon anything, but if you wanted it you could take it away at once. I may have been fond of any eatable, but if I came to learn that you too fancied it, I there and then put away what could be put away, in a clean place, to wait, Miss, for your return. We had our meals at one table; we slept in one and the same bed;

whatever the servant-girls could not remember, I reminded them of, for fear lest your temper, Miss, should get ruffled. I flattered myself that cousins, who have grown up together from their infancy, as you and I have, would have continued, through intimacy or friendship, either would have done, in peace and harmony until the end, so as to make it palpable that we are above the rest. But, contrary to all my expectations, now that you, Miss, have developed in body as well as in mind, you don't take the least heed of me. You lay hold instead of some cousin Pao or cousin Feng or other from here, there and everywhere and give them a place in your affections; while on the contrary you disregard me for three days at a stretch and decline to see anything of me for four! I have besides no brother or sister of the same mother as myself. It's true there are a couple of them, but these, are you not forsooth aware, are by another mother! You and I are only children, so I ventured to hope that you would have reciprocated my feelings. But, who'd have thought it, I've simply thrown away this heart of mine, and here I am with plenty of woes to bear, but with nowhere to go and utter them!"

While expressing these sentiments, tears, unexpectedly, trickled from his eyes.

When Lin Tai-yü caught, with her ears, his protestations, and noticed with her eyes his state of mind, she unconsciously experienced an inward pang, and, much against her will, tears too besprinkled her cheeks; so, drooping her head, she kept silent.

Her manner did not escape Pao-yü's notice. "I myself am aware," he speedily resumed, "that I'm worth nothing now; but, however imperfect I may be, I could on no account presume to become guilty of any shortcoming with you cousin. Were I to ever commit the slightest fault, your task should be either to tender me advice and warn me not to do it again, or to blow me up a little, or give me a few whacks; and all this reproof I wouldn't take amiss. But no one would have ever anticipated that you wouldn't bother your head in the least about me, and that you would be the means of driving me to my wits' ends, and so much out of my mind and off my head, as to be quite at a loss how to act for the best. In fact, were death to come upon me, I would be a spirit driven to my grave by grievances. However much exalted bonzes and eminent Taoist priests might do penance, they wouldn't succeed in releasing my soul from suffering; for it would still be needful for you to clearly explain the facts, so that I might at last be able to come to life."

After lending him a patient ear, Tai-yü suddenly banished from her memory all

recollection of the occurrences of the previous night. “Well, in that case,” she said, “why did you not let a servant-girl open the door when I came over?”

This question took Pao-yü by surprise. “What prompts you to say this?” he exclaimed. “If I have done anything of the kind, may I die at once.”

“Psha!” cried Tai-yü, “it’s not right that you-should recklessly broach the subject of living or dying at this early morn! If you say yea, it’s yea; and nay, it’s nay; what use is there to utter such oaths!”

“I didn’t really see you come over,” protested Pao-yü. “Cousin Pao-ch’ai it was, who came and sat for a while and then left.”

After some reflection, Lin Tai-yü smiled. “Yes,” she observed, “your servant-girls must, I fancy, have been too lazy to budge, grumpy and in a crossgrained mood; this is probable enough.”

“This is, I feel sure, the reason,” answered Pao-yü, “so when I go back, I’ll find out who it was, call them to task and put things right.”

“Those girls of yours;” continued Tai-yü, “should be given a lesson, but properly speaking it isn’t for me to mention anything about it. Their present insult to me is a mere trifle; but were tomorrow some Miss Pao (precious) or some Miss Pei (jewel) or other to come, and were she to be subjected to insult, won’t it be a grave matter?”

While she taunted him, she pressed her lips, and laughed sarcastically.

Pao-yü heard her remarks and felt both disposed to gnash his teeth with rage, and to treat them as a joke; but in the midst of their colloquy, they perceived a waiting-maid approach and invite them to have their meal.

Presently, the whole body of inmates crossed over to the front.

“Miss,” inquired Madame Wang at the sight of Tai-yü, “have you taken any of Dr. Pao’s medicines? Do you feel any better?”

“I simply feel so-so,” replied Lin Tai-yü, “but grandmother Chia recommended me to go on taking Dr. Wang’s medicines.”

“Mother,” Pao-yü interposed, “you’ve no idea that cousin Lin’s is an internal derangement; it’s because she was born with a delicate physique that she can’t stand the slightest cold. All she need do is to take a couple of closes of some decoction to dispel the chill; yet it’s preferable that she should have medicine in pills.”

“The other day,” said Madame Wang, “the doctor mentioned the name of some pills, but I’ve forgotten what it is.”

“I know something about pills,” put in Pao-yü; “he merely told her to take some pills or other called ‘ginseng as-a-restorative-of-the-system.’”

“That isn’t it,” Madame Wang demurred.

“The ‘Eight-precious-wholesome-to-mother’ pills,” Pao-yü proceeded, “or the ‘Left-angelica’ or ‘Right-angelica;’ if these also aren’t the ones, they must be the ‘Eight-flavour Rehmannia-glutinosa’ pills.”

“None of these,” rejoined Madame Wang, “for I remember well that there were the two words chin kang (guardians in Buddhistic temples).”

“I’ve never before,” observed Pao-yü, clapping his hands, “heard of the existence of chin kang pills; but in the event of there being any chin kang pills, there must, for a certainty, be such a thing as P’u Sa (Buddha) powder.”

At this joke, every one in the whole room burst out laughing. Pao-ch’ai compressed her lips and gave a smile. “It must, I’m inclined to think,” she suggested, “be the ‘lord-of-heaven-strengthen-the-heart’ pills!”

“Yes, that’s the name,” Madame Wang laughed, “why, now, I too have become muddle-headed.”

“You’re not muddle-headed, mother,” said Pao-yü, “it’s the mention of Chin kangs and Buddhas which confused you.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” ejaculated Madame Wang. “What you want again is your father to whip you!”

“My father,” Pao-yü laughed, “wouldn’t whip me for a thing like this.”

“Well, this being their name,” resumed Madame Wang, “you had better tell some one tomorrow to buy you a few.”

“All these drugs,” expostulated Pao-yü, “are of no earthly use. Were you, mother, to give me three hundred and sixty taels, I’ll concoct a supply of pills for my cousin, which I can certify will make her feel quite herself again before she has finished a single supply.”

“What trash!” cried Madame Wang. “What kind of medicine is there so costly!”

“It’s a positive fact,” smiled Pao-yü. “This prescription of mine is unlike all others. Besides, the very names of those drugs are quaint, and couldn’t be enumerated in a moment; suffice it to mention the placenta of the first child; three hundred and sixty ginseng roots, shaped like human beings and studded with leaves; four fat tortoises; full-grown polygonum multiflorum; the core of the Pachyma cocos, found on the roots of a fir tree of a thousand years old; and other such species of medicines. They’re not, I admit, out-of-the-way things; but they are the most excellent among that whole crowd of medicines; and were I to begin to give you a list of them, why, they’d take you all quite aback. The year before last, I at length let Hsüeh P’an have this recipe, after he had made ever so many entreaties during one or two years. When, however, he got the prescription, he had to search for another two or three years and to spend over and above a thousand taels before he succeeded in having it prepared. If you don’t believe me, mother, you are at liberty to ask cousin Pao-ch’ai about it.”

At the mention of her name, Pao-ch’ai laughingly waved her hand. “I know nothing about it,” she observed. “Nor have I heard anything about it, so don’t tell your mother to ask me any questions.”

“Really,” said Madame Wang smiling, “Pao-ch’ai is a good girl; she does not tell lies.”

Pao-yü was standing in the centre of the room. Upon hearing these words, he turned round sharply and clapped his hands. “What I stated just now,” he explained, “was the truth; yet you maintain that it was all lies.”

As he defended himself, he casually looked round, and caught sight of Lin Tai-yü at the back of Pao-ch’ai laughing with tight-set lips, and applying her fingers to her face to put him to shame.

But Lady Feng, who had been in the inner rooms overseeing the servants laying the table, came out at once, as soon as she overheard the conversation. “Brother Pao tells no lies,” she smilingly chimed in, “this is really a fact. Some time ago cousin Hsüeh P’an came over in person and asked me for pearls, and when I inquired of him what he wanted them for, he explained that they were intended to compound some medicine with; adding, in an aggrieved way, that it would have been better hadn’t he taken it in hand for he never had any idea that it would involve such a lot of trouble! When I questioned him what the medicine was, he returned for answer that it was a prescription of brother Pao’s; and he mentioned ever so many ingredients, which I don’t even remember. ‘Under other circumstances,’ he went on to say, ‘I would have purchased a few pearls, but what are absolutely wanted are such pearls as have been worn on the head; and that’s why I come to ask you, cousin, for some. If, cousin, you’ve got no broken ornaments at hand, in the shape of flowers, why, those that you have on your head will do as well; and by and bye I’ll choose a few good ones and give them to you, to wear.’ I had no other course therefore than to snap a couple of twigs from some flowers I have, made of pearls, and to let him take them away. One also requires a piece of deep red gauze, three feet in length of the best quality; and the pearls must be triturated to powder in a mortar.”

After each sentence expressed by lady Feng, Pao-yü muttered an invocation to Buddha. “The thing is as clear as sunlight now,” he remarked.

The moment lady Feng had done speaking, Pao-yü put in his word. “Mother,” he added, “you should know that this is a mere makeshift, for really, according to the letter of the prescription, these pearls and precious stones should, properly speaking, consist of such as had been obtained from, some old grave and been worn as head-ornaments by some wealthy and honourable person of bygone days. But how could one go now on this account and dig up graves, and open tombs! Hence it is that such as are simply in use among living persons can equally well be substituted.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” exclaimed Madame Wang, after listening to him throughout. “That will never do, and what an arduous job to uselessly saddle one’s self with; for even though there be interred in some graves people, who’ve been dead for several hundreds of years, it wouldn’t be a propitious thing were their corpses turned topsy-turvey now and the bones abstracted; just for the sake of preparing some medicine or other.”

Pao-yü thereupon addressed himself to Tai-yü. “Have you heard what was said or not?” he asked. “And is there, pray, any likelihood that cousin Secunda would also follow in my lead and tell lies?”

While saying this, his eyes were, albeit his face was turned towards Lin Tai-yü, fixed upon Pao-ch’ai.

Lin Tai-yü pulled Madame Wang. “You just listen to him, aunt,” she observed. “All because cousin Pao-ch’ai would not accommodate him by lying, he appeals to me.”

“Pao-yü has a great knack,” Madame Wang said, “of dealing contemptuously with you, his cousin.”

“Mother,” Pao-yü smilingly protested, “you are not aware how the case stands. When cousin Pao-ch’ai lived at home, she knew nothing whatever about my elder cousin Hsüeh P’an’s affairs, and how much less now that she has taken up her quarters inside the garden? She, of course, knows less than ever about them! Yet, cousin Lin just now stealthily treated my statements as lies, and put me to the blush.”

These words were still on his lips, when they perceived a waiting-maid, from dowager lady Chia’s apartments, come in quest of Pao-yü and Lin Tai-yü to go and have their meal. Lin Tai-yü, however, did not even call Pao-yü, but forthwith rising to her feet, she went along, dragging the waiting-maid by the hand.

“Let’s wait for master Secundus, Mr. Pao, to go along with us,” demurred the girl.

“He doesn’t want anything to eat,” Lin Tai-yü replied; “he won’t come with us, so I’ll go ahead.” So saying she promptly left the room.

“I’ll have my repast with my mother to-day,” Pao-yü said.

“Not at all,” Madame Wang remarked, “not at all. I’m going to fast to-day, so it’s only right and proper that you should go and have your own.”

“I’ll also fast with you then,” Pao-yü retorted.

As he spoke, he called out to the servant to go back, and rushing up to the table,

he took a seat.

Madame Wang faced Pao-ch'ai and her companions. "You, girls," she observed, "had better have your meal, and let him have his own way!"

"It's only right that you should go," Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Whether you have anything to eat or not, you should go over for a while to keep company to cousin Lin, as she will be quite distressed and out of spirits."

"Who cares about her!" Pao-yü rejoined, "she'll get all right again after a time."

Shortly, they finished their repast. But Pao-yü apprehended, in the first place, that his grandmother Chia, would be solicitous on his account, and longed, in the second, to be with Lin Tai-yü, so he hurriedly asked for some tea to rinse his mouth with.

"Cousin Secundus," T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un interposed with an ironic laugh, "what's the use of the hurry-scurry you're in the whole day long! Even when you're having your meals, or your tea, you're in this sort of fussy helter-skelter!"

"Make him hurry up and have his tea," Pao-ch'ai chimed in smiling, "so that he may go and look up his cousin Lin. He'll be up to all kinds of mischief if you keep him here!"

Pao-yü drank his tea. Then hastily leaving the apartment, he proceeded straightway towards the eastern court. As luck would have it, the moment he got near lady Feng's court, he descried lady Feng standing at the gateway. While standing on the step, and picking her teeth with an ear-cleaner, she superintended about ten young servant-boys removing the flower-pots from place to place. As soon as she caught sight of Pao-yü approaching, she put on a smiling face. "You come quite opportunely," she said; "walk in, walk in, and write a few characters for me."

Pao-yü had no option but to follow her in. When they reached the interior of her rooms, lady Feng gave orders to a servant to fetch a pen, inkslab and paper.

"Forty rolls of deep red ornamented satin," she began, addressing herself to Pao-yü, "forty rolls of satin with dragons; a hundred rolls of gauzes of every colour, of the finest quality; four gold necklaces…."

“What’s this?” Pao-yü shouted, “it is neither a bill; nor is it a list of presents, and in what style shall I write it?”

Lady Feng remonstrated with him. “Just you go on writing,” she said, “for, in fact, as long as I can make out what it means, it’s all that is needed.”

Pao-yü at this response felt constrained to proceed with the writing.

This over lady Feng put the paper by. As she did so, “I’ve still something more to tell you,” she smilingly pursued, “but I wonder whether you will accede to it or not. There is in your rooms a servant-maid, Hsiao Hung by name, whom I would like to bring over into my service, and I’ll select several girls tomorrow to wait on you; will this do?”

“The servants in my quarters,” answered Pao-yü, “muster a large crowd, so that, cousin, you are at perfect liberty to send for any one of them, who might take your fancy; what’s the need therefore of asking me about it?”

“If that be so,” continued lady Feng laughingly, “I’ll tell some one at once to go and bring her over.”

“Yes, she can go and fetch her,” acquiesced Pao-yü.

While replying, he made an attempt to take his leave. “Come back,” shouted lady Feng, “I’ve got something more to tell you.”

“Our venerable senior has sent for me,” Pao-yü rejoined; “if you have anything to tell me you must wait till my return.”

After this explanation, he there and then came over to his grandmother Chia’s on this side, where he found that they had already got through their meal.

“Have you had anything nice to eat with your mother?” old lady Chia asked.

“There was really nothing nice,” Pao-yü smiled. “Yet I managed to have a bowl of rice more than usual.”

“Where’s cousin Lin?” he then inquired.

“She’s in the inner rooms,” answered his grandmother.

Pao-yü stepped in. He caught sight of a waiting-maid, standing below, blowing into an iron, and two servant-girls seated on the stovecouch making a chalk line. Tai-yü with stooping head was cutting out something or other with a pair of scissors she held in her hand.

Pao-yü advanced further in. “O! what’s this that you are up to!” he smiled. “You have just had your rice and do you bob your head down in this way! Why, in a short while you’ll be having a headache again!”

Tai-yü, however, did not heed him in the least, but busied herself cutting out what she had to do.

“The corner of that piece of satin is not yet right,” a servant-girl put in. “You had better iron it again!”

Tai-yü threw down the scissors. “Why worry yourself about it?” she said; “it will get quite right after a time.”

But while Pao-yü was listening to what was being said, and was inwardly feeling in low spirits, he became aware that Pao-ch’ai, T’an Ch’un and the other girls had also arrived. After a short chat with dowager lady Chia, Pao-ch’ai likewise entered the apartment to find out what her cousin Lin was up to. The moment she espied Lin Tai-yü engaged in cutting out something: “You have,” she cried, “attained more skill than ever; for there you can even cut out clothes!”

“This too,” laughed Tai-yü sarcastically, “is a mere falsehood, to hoodwink people with, nothing more.”

“I’ll tell you a joke,” replied Pao-ch’ai smiling, “when I just now said that I did not know anything about that medicine, cousin Pao-yü felt displeased.” “Who cares!” shouted Lin Tai-yü. “He’ll get all right shortly.”

“Our worthy grandmother wishes to play at dominoes,” Pao-yü thereupon interposed directing his remarks to Pao-ch’ai; “and there’s no one there at present to have a game with her; so you’d better go and play with her.”

“Have I come over now to play dominoes!” promptly smiled Pao-ch’ai when she heard his suggestion. With this remark, she nevertheless at once quitted the room.

“It would be well for you to go,” urged Lin Tai-yü, “for there’s a tiger in here; and, look out, he might eat you up.”

As she spoke, she went on with her cutting.

Pao-yü perceived how both she was to give him any of her attention, and he had no alternative but to force a smile and to observe: “You should also go for a stroll! It will be time enough by and bye to continue your cutting.”

But Tai-yü would pay no heed whatever to him. Pao-yü addressed himself therefore to the servant-girls. “Who has taught her how to cut out these things?” he asked.

“What does it matter who taught me how to cut?” Tai-yü vehemently exclaimed, when she realised that he was speaking to the maids. “It’s no business of yours, Mr. Secundus.”

Pao-yü was then about to say something in his defence when he saw a servant come in and report that there was some one outside who wished to see him. At this announcement, Pao-yü betook himself with alacrity out of the room.

“O-mi-to-fu!” observed Tai-yü, turning outwards, “it wouldn’t matter to you if you found me dead on your return!”

On his arrival outside, Pao-yü discovered Pei Ming. “You are invited,” he said, “to go to Mr. Feng’s house.”

Upon hearing this message, Pao-yü knew well enough that it was about the project mooted the previous day, and accordingly he told him to go and ask for his clothes, while he himself wended his steps into the library.

Pei Ming came forthwith to the second gate and waited for some one to appear. Seeing an old woman walk out, Pei Ming went up to her. “Our Master Secundus, Mr. Pao,” he told her, “is in the study waiting for his out-door clothes; so do go in, worthy dame, and deliver the message.”

“It would be better,” replied the old woman, “if you did not echo your mother’s absurdities! Our Master Secundus, Mr. Pao, now lives in the garden, and all the servants, who attend on him, stay in the garden; and do you again come and bring the message here?”

At these words, Pei Ming smiled. “You’re quite right,” he rejoined, “in reproving me, for I’ve become quite idiotic.”

So saying, he repaired with quick step to the second gate on the east side, where, by a lucky hit, the young servant-boys on duty, were kicking marbles on the raised road. Pei Ming explained to them the object of his coming. A young boy thereupon ran in. After a long interval, he, at length, made his appearance, holding, enfolded in his arms, a bundle of clothes, which he handed to Pei Ming, who then returned to the library. Pao-yü effected a change in his costume, and giving directions to saddle his horse, he only took along with him the four servant-boys, Pei Ming, Chu Lo, Shuang Jui and Shou Erh, and started on his way. He reached Feng Tzu-ying’s doorway by a short cut. A servant announced his arrival, and Feng Tzu-ying came out and ushered him in. Here he discovered Hsüeh P’an, who had already been waiting a long time, and several singing-boys besides; as well as Chiang Yü-han, who played female roles, and Yün Erh, a courtesan in the Chin Hsiang court. The whole company exchanged salutations. They next had tea. “What you said the other day,” smiled Pao-yü, raising his cup, “about good fortune coming out of evil fortune has preyed so much upon my mind, both by day and night, that the moment I received your summons I hurried to come immediately.”

“My worthy cousins,” rejoined Feng Tzu-ying smiling. “You’re all far too credulous! It’s a mere hoax that I made use of the other day. For so much did I fear that you would be sure to refuse if I openly asked you to a drinking bout, that I thought it fit to say what I did. But your attendance to-day, so soon after my invitation, makes it clear, little though one would have thought it, that you’ve all taken it as pure gospel truth.”

This admission evoked laughter from the whole company. The wines were afterwards placed on the table, and they took the seats consistent with their grades. Feng Tzu-ying first and foremost called the singing-boys and offered them a drink. Next he told Yün Erh to also approach and have a cup of wine.

By the time, however, that Hsüeh P’an had had his third cup, he of a sudden lost control over his feelings, and clasping Yün Erh’s hand in his: “Do sing me,” he smiled, “that novel ballad of your own composition; and I’ll drink a whole jar full. Eh, will you?”

This appeal compelled Yün Erh to take up the guitar. She then sang:

Lovers have I two. To set aside either I cannot bear. When my heart longs for thee to come, It also yearns for him. Both are in form handsome and fair. Their beauty to describe it would be hard. Just think, last night, when at a silent hour, we met in secret, by the trellis frame laden with roses white, One to his feelings stealthily was giving vent, When lo, the other caught us in the act, And laying hands on us; there we three stood like litigants before the bar. And I had, verily, no word in answer for myself to give.

At the close of her song, she laughed. “Well now,” she cried, “down with that whole jar!”

“Why, it isn’t worth a jarful,” smiled Hsüeh P’an at these words. “Favour us with some other good song!”

“Listen to what I have to suggest,” Pao-yü interposed, a smile on his lips. “If you go on drinking in this reckless manner, we will easily get drunk and there will be no fun in it. I’ll take the lead and swallow a large cupful and put in force a new penalty; and any one of you who doesn’t comply with it, will be mulcted in ten large cupfuls, in quick succession!”

Speedily rising from the banquet, he poured the wine for the company. Feng Tzu-ying and the rest meanwhile exclaimed with one voice: “Quite right! quite right!”

Pao-yü then lifted a large cup and drained it with one draught. “We will now,” he proposed, “dilate on the four characters, ‘sad, wounded, glad and joyful.’ But while discoursing about young ladies, we’ll have to illustrate the four states as well. At the end of this recitation, we’ll have to drink the ‘door cup’ over the wine, to sing an original and seasonable ballad, while over the heel taps, to make allusion to some object on the table, and devise something with some old poetical lines or ancient scrolls, from the Four Books or the Five Classics, or with some set phrases.”

Hsüeh P’an gave him no time to finish. He was the first to stand up and prevent him from proceeding. “I won’t join you, so don’t count me; this is, in fact, done in order to play tricks upon me.”

Yün Erh, however, also rose to her feet and shoved him down into his seat.

“What are you in such a funk for?” she laughed. “You’re fortunate enough to be

able to drink wine daily, and can't you, forsooth, even come up to me? Yet I mean to recite, by and bye, my own share. If you say what's right, well and good; if you don't, you will simply have to swallow several cups of wine as a forfeit, and is it likely you'll die from drunkenness? Are you, pray, going now to disregard this rule and to drink, instead, ten large cups; besides going down to pour the wine?"

One and all clapped in applause. "Well said!" they shouted.

After this, Hüeh P'an had no way out of it and felt compelled to resume his seat.

They then heard Pao-yü recite:

A girl is sad, When her springtime of life is far advanced and she still occupies a vacant inner-room. A girl feels wounded in her heart, When she regrets having allowed her better half to go abroad and win a marquisdom. A girl is glad, When looking in the mirror, at the time of her morning toilette, she finds her colour fair. A girl is joyful, What time she sits on the frame of a gallows-swing, clad in a thin spring gown.

Having listened to him, "Capital!" one and all cried out in a chorus. Hsüeh P'an alone raised his face, shook his head and remarked: "It isn't good, he must be fined."

"Why should he be fined?" demurred the party.

"Because," retorted Hsüeh P'an, "what he says is entirely unintelligible to me. So how can he not be fined?"

Yün Erh gave him a pinch.—"Just you quietly think of yours," she laughed; "for if by and bye you are not ready you'll also have to bear a fine."

In due course Pao-yü took up the guitar. He was heard to sing:

"When mutual thoughts arise, tears, blood-stained, endless drop, like lentiles sown broadcast. In spring, in ceaseless bloom nourish willows and flowers around the painted tower. Inside the gauze-lattice peaceful sleep flies, when, after dark, come wind and rain. Both new-born sorrows and longstanding griefs cannot from memory ever die! E'en jade-fine rice, and gold-like drinks they make hard to go down; they choke the throat. The lass has not the heart to desist

gazing in the glass at her wan face. Nothing can from that knitted brow of hers those frowns dispel; For hard she finds it patient to abide till the clepsydra will have run its course. Alas! how fitly like the faint outline of a green hill which nought can screen; Or like a green-tinged stream, which ever ceaseless floweth onward far and wide!”

When the song drew to an end, his companions with one voice cried out: “Excellent!”

Hsüeh P’an was the only one to find fault. “There’s no metre in them,” he said.

Pao-yü quaffed the “opening cup,” then seizing a pear, he added:

“While the rain strikes the pear-blossom I firmly close the door,”

and thus accomplished the requirements of the rule.

Feng Tzu-ying’s turn came next.

“A maid is glad.”

he commenced:

When at her first confinement she gives birth to twins, both sons. A maid is joyful, When on the sly she to the garden creeps crickets to catch. A maid is sad, When her husband some sickness gets and lies in a bad state. A maiden is wounded at heart, When a fierce wind blows down the tower, where she makes her toilette.

Concluding this recitation, he raised the cup and sang:

“Thou art what one could aptly call a man. But thou’rt endowed with somewhat too much heart! How queer thou art, crossgrained and impish shrewd! A spirit too, thou couldst not be more shrewd. If all I say thou dost not think is true, In secret just a minute search pursue; For then thou’lt know if I love thee or not.”

His song over, he drank the “opening cup” and then observed:

“The cock crows when the moon’s rays shine upon the thatchèd inn.”

After his observance of the rule followed Yün Erh's turn.

A girl is sad,

Yün Erh began,

When she tries to divine on whom she will depend towards the end of life.

"My dear child!" laughingly exclaimed Hsüeh P'an, "your worthy Mr. Hsüeh still lives, and why do you give way to fears?"

"Don't confuse her!" remonstrated every one of the party, "don't muddle her!"

"A maiden is wounded at heart."

Yün Erh proceeded:

"When her mother beats and scolds her and never for an instant doth desist."

"It was only the other day," interposed Hsüeh P'an, "that I saw your mother and that I told her that I would not have her beat you."

"If you still go on babbling," put in the company with one consent, "you'll be fined ten cups."

Hsüeh P'an promptly administered himself a slap on the mouth. "How you lack the faculty of hearing!" he exclaimed. "You are not to say a word more!"

"A girl is glad,"

Yün Erh then resumed:

When her lover cannot brook to leave her and return home. A maiden is joyful, When hushing the pan-pipe and double pipe, a stringed instrument she thrums.

At the end of her effusion, she at once began to sing:

"T'is the third day of the third moon, the nutmegs bloom; A maggot, lo, works hard to pierce into a flower; But though it ceaseless bores it cannot penetrate. So crouching on the buds, it swing-like rocks itself. My precious pet, my own dear

little darling, If I don’t choose to open how can you steal in?”

Finishing her song, she drank the “opening cup,” after which she added: “the delicate peach-blossom,” and thus complied with the exigencies of the rule.

Next came Hsüeh P’an. “Is it for me to speak now?” Hsüeh P’an asked.

“A maiden is sad…”

But a long time elapsed after these words were uttered and yet nothing further was heard.

“Sad for what?” Feng Tzu-ying laughingly asked. “Go on and tell us at once!”

Hsüeh P’an was much perplexed. His eyes rolled about like a bell.

“A girl is sad…”

he hastily repeated. But here again he coughed twice before he proceeded.

“A girl is sad.”

he said:

“When she marries a spouse who is a libertine.”

This sentence so tickled the fancy of the company that they burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

“What amuses you so?” shouted Hsüeh P’an, “is it likely that what I say is not correct? If a girl marries a man, who chooses to forget all virtue, how can she not feel sore at heart?”

But so heartily did they all laugh that their bodies were bent in two. “What you say is quite right,” they eagerly replied. “So proceed at once with the rest.”

Hsüeh P’an thereupon stared with vacant gaze.

“A girl is grieved….”

he added:

But after these few words he once more could find nothing to say.

“What is she grieved about?” they asked.

“When a huge monkey finds its way into the inner room.”

Hsüeh P’an retorted.

This reply set every one laughing. “He must be mulcted,” they cried, “he must be mulcted. The first one could anyhow be overlooked; but this line is more unintelligible.”

As they said this, they were about to pour the wine, when Pao-yü smilingly interfered. “The rhyme is all right,” he observed.

“The master of the rules,” Hsüeh P’an remarked, “approves it in every way, so what are you people fussing about?”

Hearing this, the company eventually let the matter drop.

“The two lines, that follow, are still more difficult,” suggested Yün Erh with a smile, “so you had better let me recite for you.”

“Fiddlesticks!” exclaimed Hsüeh P’an, “do you really fancy that I have no good ones! Just you listen to what I shall say.

“A girl is glad, When in the bridal room she lies, with flowery candles burning, and she is loth to rise at morn.”

This sentiment filled one and all with amazement. “How supremely excellent this line is!” they ejaculated.

“A girl is joyful,”

Hsüeh P’an resumed,

“During the consummation of wedlock.”

Upon catching this remark, the party turned their heads away, and shouted: “Dreadful! Dreadful! But quick sing your song and have done.”

Forthwith Hsüeh P’an sang:

“A mosquito buzzes heng, heng, heng!”

Every one was taken by surprise. “What kind of song is this?” they inquired.

But Hsüeh P’an went on singing:

“Two flies buzz weng, weng, weng.”

“Enough,” shouted his companions, “that will do, that will do!”

“Do you want to hear it or not?” asked Hsüeh P’an, “this is a new kind of song, called the ‘Heng, heng air,’ but if you people are not disposed to listen, let me off also from saying what I have to say over the heel-taps and I won’t then sing.”

“We’ll let you off! We’ll let you off,” answered one and all, “so don’t be hindering others.”

“A maiden is sad,”

Chiang Yü-han at once began,

When her husband leaves home and never does return. A maiden is disconsolate, When she has no money to go and buy some *olea frangrans* oil. A maiden is glad, When the wick of the lantern forms two heads like twin flowers on one stem. A maiden is joyful, When true conjugal peace prevails between her and her mate.

His recital over, he went on to sing:

“How I love thee with those seductive charms of thine, heaven-born! In truth thou’rt like a living fairy from the azure skies! The spring of life we now enjoy; we are yet young in years. Our union is, indeed, a happy match! But. lo! the milky way doth at its zenith soar; Hark to the drums which beat around in the watch towers; So raise the silver lamp and let us soft under the nuptial curtain steal.”

Finishing the song, he drank the “opening cup.” “I know,” he smiled, “few poetical quotations bearing on this sort of thing. By a stroke of good fortune,

however, I yesterday conned a pair of antithetical scrolls; of these I can only remember just one line, but lucky enough for me the object it refers to figures as well on this festive board."

This said he forthwith drained the wine, and, picking up a bud of a diminutive variety of *olea fragrans*, he recited:

"When the perfume of flowers wafts (hsi jen) itself into a man, he knows the day is warm."

The company unanimously conceded that the rule had been adhered to. But Hsüeh P'an once again jumped up. "It's awful, awful!" he bawled out boisterously; "he should be fined, he should be made to pay a forfeit; there's no precious article whatever on this table; how is it then that you introduce precious things?"

"There was nothing about precious things!" Chiang Yü-han vehemently explained.

"What I are you still prevaricating?" Hsüeh P'an cried, "Well, repeat it again!"

Chiang Yü-han had no other course but to recite the line a second time. "Now is not Hsi Jen a precious thing?" Hsüeh P'an asked. "If she isn't, what is she? And if you don't believe me, you ask him about it," pointing, at the conclusion of this remark, at Pao-yü.

Pao-yü felt very uncomfortable. Rising to his feet, "Cousin," he observed, "you should be fined heavily."

"I should be! I should be!" Hsüeh P'an shouted, and saying this, he took up the wine and poured it down his throat with one gulp.

Feng Tzu-ying, Chiang Yü-han and their companions thereupon asked him to explain the allusion. Yün Erh readily told them, and Chiang Yü-han hastily got up and pleaded guilty.

"Ignorance," the party said with one consent, "does not amount to guilt."

But presently Pao-yü quitted the banquet to go and satisfy a natural want and Chiang Yü-han followed him out. The two young fellows halted under the eaves

of the verandah, and Chiang Yü-han then recommenced to make ample apologies. Pao-yü, however, was so attracted by his handsome and genial appearance, that he took quite a violent fancy to him; and squeezing his hand in a firm grip. “If you have nothing to do,” he urged, “do let us go over to our place. I’ve got something more to ask you. It’s this, there’s in your worthy company some one called Ch’i Kuan, with a reputation extending at present throughout the world; but, unfortunately, I alone have not had the good luck of seeing him even once.”

“This is really,” rejoined Chiang Yü-han with a smile, “my own infant name.”

This disclosure at once made Pao-yü quite exuberant, and stamping his feet he smiled. “How lucky! I’m in luck’s way!” he exclaimed. “In very truth your reputation is no idle report. But to-day is our first meeting, and what shall I do?”

After some thought, he produced a fan from his sleeve, and, unloosening one of the jade pendants, he handed it to Ch’i Kuan. “This is a mere trifle,” he said. “It does not deserve your acceptance, yet it will be a small souvenir of our acquaintance to-day.”

Ch’i Kuan received it with a smile. “I do not deserve,” he replied, “such a present. How am I worthy of such an honour! But never mind, I’ve also got about me here a strange thing, which I put on this morning; it is brand-new yet, and will, I hope, suffice to prove to you a little of the feeling of esteem which I entertain for you.”

With these protestations, he raised his garment, and, untying a deep red sash, with which his nether clothes were fastened, he presented it to Pao-yü. “This sash,” he remarked, “is an article brought as tribute from the Queen of the Hsi Hsiang Kingdom. If you attach this round you in summer, your person will emit a fragrant perfume, and it will not perspire. It was given to me yesterday by the Prince of Pei Ching, and it is only to-day that I put it on. To any one else, I would certainly not be willing to present it. But, Mr. Secundus, please do unfasten the one you have on and give it to me to bind round me.”

This proposal extremely delighted Pao-yü. With precipitate haste, he accepted his gift, and, undoing the dark brown sash he wore, he surrendered it to Ch’i Kuan. But both had just had time to adjust their respective sashes when they heard a loud voice say: “Oh! I’ve caught you!” And they perceived Hsüeh P’an

come out by leaps and bounds. Clutching the two young fellows, “What do you,” he exclaimed, “leave your wine for and withdraw from the banquet. Be quick and produce those things, and let me see them!”

“There’s nothing to see!” rejoined the two young fellows with one voice.

Hsüeh P’an, however, would by no means fall in with their views. And it was only Feng Tzu-ying, who made his appearance on the scene, who succeeded in dissuading him. So resuming their seats, they drank until dark, when the company broke up.

Pao-yü, on his return into the garden, loosened his clothes, and had tea. But Hsi Jen noticed that the pendant had disappeared from his fan and she inquired of him what had become of it.

“I must have lost it this very moment,” Pao-yü replied.

At bedtime, however, descrying a deep red sash, with spots like specks of blood, attached round his waist, Hsi Jen guessed more or less the truth of what must have transpired. “As you have such a nice sash to fasten your trousers with,” Hsi Jen consequently said, “you’d better return that one of mine.”

This reminder made the fact dawn upon Pao-yü that the sash had originally been the property of Hsi Jen, and that he should by rights not have parted with it; but however much he felt his conscience smitten by remorse, he failed to see how he could very well disclose the truth to her. He could therefore only put on a smiling expression and add, “I’ll give you another one instead.”

Hsi Jen was prompted by his rejoinder to nod her head and sigh. “I felt sure;” she observed; “that you’d go again and do these things! Yet you shouldn’t take my belongings and bestow them on that low-bred sort of people. Can it be that no consideration finds a place in your heart?”

She then felt disposed to tender him a few more words of admonition, but dreading, on the other hand, lest she should, by irritating him, bring the fumes of the wine to his head, she thought it best to also retire to bed.

Nothing worth noticing occurred during that night. The next day, when she woke up at the break of day, she heard Pao-yü call out laughingly: “Robbers have been here in the night; are you not aware of it? Just you look at my trousers.”

Hsi Jen lowered her head and looked. She saw at a glance that the sash, which Pao-yü had worn the previous day, was bound round her own waist, and she at once realised that Pao-yü must have effected the change during the night; but promptly unbinding it, “I don’t care for such things!” she cried, “quick, take it away!”

At the sight of her manner, Pao-yü had to coax her with gentle terms. This so disarmed Hsi Jen, that she felt under the necessity of putting on the sash; but, subsequently when Pao-yü stepped out of the apartment, she at last pulled it off, and, throwing it away in an empty box, she found one of hers and fastened it round her waist.

Pao-yü, however, did not in the least notice what she did, but inquired whether anything had happened the day before.

“Lady Secunda,” Hsi Jen explained, “dispatched some one and fetched Hsiao Hung away. Her wish was to have waited for your return; but as I thought that it was of no consequence, I took upon myself to decide, and sent her off.”

“That’s all right!” rejoined Pao-yü. “I knew all about it, there was no need for her to wait.”

“Yesterday,” resumed Hsi Jen, “the Imperial Consort deputed the Eunuch Hsia to bring a hundred and twenty ounces of silver and to convey her commands that from the first to the third, there should be offered, in the Ch’ing Hsu temple, thanksgiving services to last for three days and that theatrical performances should be given, and oblations presented: and to tell our senior master, Mr. Chia Chen, to take all the gentlemen, and go and burn incense and worship Buddha. Besides this, she also sent presents for the dragon festival.”

Continuing, she bade a young servant-maid produce the presents, which had been received the previous day. Then he saw two palace fans of the best quality, two strings of musk-scented beads, two rolls of silk, as fine as the phoenix tail, and a superior mat worked with hibiscus. At the sight of these things, Pao-yü was filled with immeasurable pleasure, and he asked whether the articles brought to all the others were similar to his.

“The only things in excess of yours that our venerable mistress has,” Hsi Jen explained, “consist of a scented jade sceptre and a pillow made of agate. Those of your worthy father and mother, our master and mistress, and of your aunt

exceed yours by a scented sceptre of jade. Yours are the same as Miss Pao's. Miss Lin's are like those of Misses Secunda, Tertia and Quarta, who received nothing beyond a fan and several pearls and none of all the other things. As for our senior lady, Mrs. Chia Chu, and lady Secunda, these two got each two rolls of gauze, two rolls of silk, two scented bags, and two sticks of medicine."

After listening to her enumeration, "What's the reason of this?" he smiled. "How is it that Miss Lin's are not the same as mine, but that Miss Pao's instead are like my own? May not the message have been wrongly delivered?"

"When they were brought out of the palace yesterday," Hsi Jen rejoined, "they were already divided in respective shares, and slips were also placed on them, so that how could any mistake have been made? Yours were among those for our dowager lady's apartments. When I went and fetched them, her venerable ladyship said that I should tell you to go there tomorrow at the fifth watch to return thanks.

"Of course, it's my duty to go over," Pao-yü cried at these words, but forthwith calling Tzu Chüan: "Take these to your Miss Lin," he told her, "and say that I got them, yesterday, and that she is at liberty to keep out of them any that take her fancy."

Tzu Chüan expressed her obedience and took the things away. After a short time she returned. "Miss Lin says," she explained, "that she also got some yesterday, and that you, Master Secundus, should keep yours."

Hearing this reply, Pao-yü quickly directed a servant to put them away. But when he had washed his face and stepped out of doors, bent upon going to his grandmother's on the other side, in order to pay his obeisance, he caught sight of Lin Tai-yü coming along towards him, from the opposite direction. Pao-yü hurriedly walked up to her, "I told you," he smiled, "to select those you liked from my things; how is it you didn't choose any?"

Lin Tai-yü had long before banished from her recollection the incident of the previous day, which had made her angry with Pao-yü, and was only exercised about the occurrence of this present occasion. "I'm not gifted with such extreme good fortune," she consequently answered, "as to be able to accept them. I can't compete with Miss Pao, in connection with whom something or other about gold or about jade is mentioned. We are simply beings connected with the vegetable

kingdom."

The allusion to the two words "gold and jade," aroused, of a sudden, much emotion in the heart of Pao-yü. "If beyond what people say about gold or jade," he protested, "the idea of any such things ever crosses my mind, may the heavens annihilate me, and may the earth extinguish me, and may I for ten thousand generations never assume human form!"

These protestations convinced Lin Tai-yü that suspicion had been aroused in him. With all promptitude, she smiled and observed, "They're all to no use! Why utter such oaths, when there's no rhyme or reason! Who cares about any gold or any jade of yours!"

"It would be difficult for me to tell you, to your face, all the secrets of my heart," Pao-yü resumed, "but by and bye you'll surely come to know all about them! After the three—my old grandmother, my father and my mother—you, my cousin, hold the fourth place; and, if there be a fifth, I'm ready to swear another oath."

"You needn't swear any more," Lin Tai-yü replied, "I'm well aware that I, your younger cousin, have a place in your heart; but the thing is that at the sight of your elder cousin, you at once forget all about your younger cousin."

"This comes again from over-suspicion!" ejaculated Pao; "for I'm not at all disposed that way."

"Well," resumed Lin Tai-yü, "why did you yesterday appeal to me when that hussey Pao-ch'ai would not help you by telling a story? Had it been I, who had been guilty of any such thing, I don't know what you wouldn't have done again."

But during their *tête-a-tête*, they espied Pao-ch'ai approach from the opposite direction, so readily they beat a retreat. Pao-ch'ai had distinctly caught sight of them, but pretending she had not seen them, she trudged on her way, with lowered head, and repaired into Madame Wang's apartments. After a short stay, she came to this side to pay dowager lady Chia a visit. With her she also found Pao-yü.

Pao-ch'ai ever made it a point to hold Pao-yü aloof as her mother had in days gone by mentioned to Madame Wang and her other relatives that the gold locket

had been the gift of a bonze, that she had to wait until such time as some suitor with jade turned up before she could be given in marriage, and other similar confidences. But on discovery the previous day that Yüan Ch'un's presents to her alone resembled those of Pao-yü, she began to feel all the more embarrassed. Luckily, however, Pao-yü was so entangled in Lin Tai-yü's meshes and so absorbed in heart and mind with fond thoughts of his Lin Tai-yü that he did not pay the least attention to this circumstance. But she unawares now heard Pao-yü remark with a smile: "Cousin Pao, let me see that string of scented beads of yours!"

By a strange coincidence, Pao-ch'ai wore the string of beads round her left wrist so she had no alternative, when Pao-yü asked her for it, than to take it off. Pao-ch'ai, however, was naturally inclined to embonpoint, and it proved therefore no easy matter for her to get the beads off; and while Pao-yü stood by watching her snow-white arm, feelings of admiration were quickly stirred up in his heart. "Were this arm attached to Miss Lin's person," he secretly pondered, "I might, possibly have been able to caress it! But it is, as it happens, part and parcel of her body; how I really do deplore this lack of good fortune."

Suddenly he bethought himself of the secret of gold and jade, and he again scanned Pao-ch'ai's appearance. At the sight of her countenance, resembling a silver bowl, her eyes limpid like water and almond-like in shape, her lips crimson, though not rouged, her eyebrows jet-black, though not pencilled, also of that fascination and grace which presented such a contrast to Lin Tai-yü's style of beauty, he could not refrain from falling into such a stupid reverie, that though Pao-ch'ai had got the string of beads off her wrist, and was handing them to him, he forgot all about them and made no effort to take them. Pao-ch'ai realised that he was plunged in abstraction, and conscious of the awkward position in which she was placed, she put down the string of beads, and turning round was on the point of betaking herself away, when she perceived Lin Tai-yü, standing on the doorstep, laughing significantly while biting a handkerchief she held in her mouth. "You can't resist," Pao-ch'ai said, "a single puff of wind; and why do you stand there and expose yourself to the very teeth of it?"

"Wasn't I inside the room?" rejoined Lin Tai-yü, with a cynical smile. "But I came out to have a look as I heard a shriek in the heavens; it turned out, in fact, to be a stupid wild goose!"

"A stupid wild goose!" repeated Pao-ch'ai. "Where is it, let me also see it!"

“As soon as I got out,” answered Lin Tai-yü, “it flew away with a ‘t’e-rh’ sort of noise.”

While replying, she threw the handkerchief, she was holding, straight into Pao-yü‘s face. Pao-yü was quite taken by surprise. He was hit on the eye. “Ai-yah!” he exclaimed.

But, reader, do you want to hear the sequel? In that case, listen to the circumstances, which will be disclosed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A happy man enjoys a full measure of happiness, but still prays for happiness. A beloved girl is very much loved, but yet craves for more love.

Pao-yü, so our story runs, was gazing vacantly, when Tai-yü, at a moment least expected, flung her handkerchief at him, which just hit him on the eyes, and frightened him out of his wits. “Who was it?” he cried.

Lin Tai-yü nodded her head and smiled. “I would not venture to do such a thing,” she said, “it was a mere slip of my hand. As cousin Pao-ch’ai wished to see the silly wild goose, I was pointing it out to her, when the handkerchief inadvertently flew out of my grip.”

Pao-yü kept on rubbing his eyes. The idea suggested itself to him to make some remonstrance, but he could not again very well open his lips.

Presently, lady Feng arrived. She then alluded, in the course of conversation, to the thanksgiving service, which was to be offered on the first, in the Ch’ing Hsü temple, and invited Pao-ch’ai, Pao-yü, Tai-yü and the other inmates with them to be present at the theatricals.

“Never mind,” smiled Pao-ch’ai, “it’s too hot; besides, what plays haven’t I seen? I don’t mean to come.”

“It’s cool enough over at their place,” answered lady Feng. “There are also two-

storied buildings on either side; so we must all go! I'll send servants a few days before to drive all that herd of Taoist priests out, to sweep the upper stories, hang up curtains, and to keep out every single loafer from the interior of the temple; so it will be all right like that. I've already told our Madame Wang that if you people don't go, I mean to go all alone, as I've been again in very low spirits these last few days, and as when theatricals come off at home, it's out of the question for me to look on with any peace and quiet."

When dowager lady Chia heard what she said, she smiled. "Well, in that case," she remarked, "I'll go along with you."

Lady Feng, at these words, gave a smile. "Venerable ancestor," she replied, "were you also to go, it would be ever so much better; yet I won't feel quite at my ease!"

"Tomorrow," dowager lady Chia continued, "I can stay in the two-storied building, situated on the principal site, while you can go to the one on the side. You can then likewise dispense with coming over to where I shall be to stand on any ceremonies. Will this suit you or not?"

"This is indeed," lady Feng smiled, "a proof of your regard for me, my worthy senior."

Old lady Chia at this stage faced Pao-ch'ai. "You too should go," she said, "so should your mother; for if you remain the whole day long at home, you will again sleep your head off."

Pao-ch'ai felt constrained to signify her assent. Dowager lady Chia then also despatched domestics to invite Mrs. Hsüeh; and, on their way, they notified Madame Wang that she was to take the young ladies along with her. But Madame Wang felt, in the first place, in a poor state of health, and was, in the second, engaged in making preparations for the reception of any arrivals from Yüan Ch'un, so that she, at an early hour, sent word that it was impossible for her to leave the house. Yet when she received old lady Chia's behest, she smiled and exclaimed: "Are her spirits still so buoyant!" and transmitted the message into the garden that any, who had any wish to avail themselves of the opportunity, were at liberty to go on the first, with their venerable senior as their chaperonne. As soon as these tidings were spread abroad, every one else was indifferent as to whether they went or not; but of those girls who, day after day,

never put their foot outside the doorstep, which of them was not keen upon going, the moment they heard the permission conceded to them? Even if any of their respective mistresses were too lazy to move, they employed every expedient to induce them to go. Hence it was that Li Kung-ts'ai and the other inmates signified their unanimous intention to be present. Dowager lady Chia, at this, grew more exultant than ever, and she issued immediate directions for servants to go and sweep and put things in proper order. But to all these preparations, there is no necessity of making detailed reference; sufficient to relate that on the first day of the moon, carriages stood in a thick maze, and men and horses in close concourse, at the entrance of the Jung Kuo mansion.

When the servants, the various managers and other domestics came to learn that the Imperial Consort was to perform good deeds and that dowager lady Chia was to go in person and offer incense, they arranged, as it happened that the first of the moon, which was the principal day of the ceremonies, was, in addition, the season of the dragon-boat festival, all the necessary articles in perfect readiness and with unusual splendour. Shortly, old lady Chia and the other inmates started on their way. The old lady sat in an official chair, carried by eight bearers: widow Li, lady Feng and Mrs. Hsüeh, each in a four-bearer chair. Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü mounted together a curricle with green cover and pearl tassels, bearing the eight precious things. The three sisters, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un got in a carriage with red wheels and ornamented hood. Next in order, followed dowager lady Chia's waiting-maids, Yüan Yang, Ying Wu, Hu Po, Chen Chu; Lin Tai-yü's waiting-maids Tzu Chüan, Hsüeh Yen, and Ch'un Ch'ien; Pao-ch'ai's waiting-maids Ying Erh and Wen Hsing; Ying Ch'un's servant-girls Ssu Ch'i and Hsiu Chü; T'an Ch'un's waiting-maids Shih Shu and Ts'ui Mo; Hsi Ch'un's servant-girls Ju Hua and Ts'ai P'ing; and Mrs. Hsüeh's waiting-maids T'ung Hsi, and T'ung Kuei. Besides these, were joined to their retinue: Hsiang Ling and Hsiang Ling's servant-girl Ch'in Erh; Mrs. Li's waiting-maids Su Yün and Pi Yüeh; lady Feng's servant-girls P'ing Erh, Feng Erh and Hsiao Hung, as well as Madame Wang's two waiting-maids Chin Ch'uan and Ts'ai Yün. Along with lady Feng, came a nurse carrying Ta Chieh Erh. She drove in a separate carriage, together with a couple of servant-girls. Added also to the number of the suite were matrons and nurses, attached to the various establishments, and the wives of the servants of the household, who were in attendance out of doors. Their carriages, forming one black solid mass, therefore, crammed the whole extent of the street.

Dowager lady Chia and other members of the party had already proceeded a

considerable distance in their chairs, and yet the inmates at the gate had not finished mounting their vehicles. This one shouted: “I won’t sit with you.” That one cried: “You’ve crushed our mistress’ bundle.” In the carriages yonder, one screamed: “You’ve pulled my flowers off.” Another one nearer exclaimed: “You’ve broken my fan.” And they chatted and chatted, and talked and laughed with such incessant volubility, that Chou Jui’s wife had to go backward and forward calling them to task. “Girls,” she said, “this is the street. The on-lookers will laugh at you!” But it was only after she had expostulated with them several times that any sign of improvement became at last visible.

The van of the procession had long ago reached the entrance of the Ch’ing Hsü Temple. Pao-yü rode on horseback. He preceded the chair occupied by his grandmother Chia. The throngs that filled the streets ranged themselves on either side.

On their arrival at the temple, the sound of bells and the rattle of drums struck their ear. Forthwith appeared the head-bonze Chang, a stick of incense in hand; his cloak thrown over his shoulders. He took his stand by the wayside at the head of a company of Taoist priests to present his greetings. The moment dowager lady Chia reached, in her chair, the interior of the main gate, she descried the lares and penates, the lord presiding over that particular district, and the clay images of the various gods, and she at once gave orders to halt. Chia Chen advanced to receive her acting as leader to the male members of the family. Lady Feng was well aware that Yüan Yang and the other attendants were at the back and could not overtake their old mistress, so she herself alighted from her chair to volunteer her services. She was about to hastily press forward and support her, when, by a strange accident, a young Taoist neophyte, of twelve or thirteen years of age, who held a case containing scissors, with which he had been snuffing the candles burning in the various places, just seized the opportunity to run out and hide himself, when he unawares rushed, head foremost, into lady Feng’s arms. Lady Feng speedily raised her hand and gave him such a slap on the face that she made the young fellow reel over and perform a somersault. “You boorish young bastard!” she shouted, “where are you running to?”

The young Taoist did not even give a thought to picking up the scissors, but crawling up on to his feet again, he tried to scamper outside. But just at that very moment Pao-ch’ai and the rest of the young ladies were dismounting from their vehicles, and the matrons and women-servants were closing them in so thoroughly on all sides that not a puff of wind or a drop of rain could penetrate,

and when they perceived a Taoist neophyte come rushing headlong out of the place, they, with one voice, exclaimed: “Catch him, catch him! Beat him, beat him!”

Old lady Chia overheard their cries. She asked with alacrity what the fuss was all about. Chia Chen immediately stepped outside to make inquiries. Lady Feng then advanced and, propping up her old senior, she went on to explain to her that a young Taoist priest, whose duties were to snuff the candles, had not previously retired out of the compound, and that he was now endeavouring to recklessly force his way out.”

“Be quick and bring the lad here,” shouted dowager lady Chia, as soon as she heard her explanation, “but, mind, don’t frighten him. Children of mean families invariably get into the way of being spoilt by over-indulgence. How ever could he have set eyes before upon such display as this! Were you to frighten him, he will really be much to be pitied; and won’t his father and mother be exceedingly cut up?”

As she spoke, she asked Chia Chen to go and do his best to bring him round. Chia Chen felt under the necessity of going, and he managed to drag the lad into her presence. With the scissors still clasped in his hand, the lad fell on his knees, and trembled violently.

Dowager lady Chia bade Chia Chen raise him up. “There’s nothing to fear!” she said reassuringly. Then she asked him how old he was.

The boy, however, could on no account give vent to speech.

“Poor boy!” once more exclaimed the old lady. And continuing: “Brother Chen,” she added, addressing herself to Chia Chen, “take him away, and give him a few cash to buy himself fruit with; and do impress upon every one that they are not to bully him.”

Chia Chen signified his assent and led him off.

During this time, old lady Chia, taking along with her the whole family party, paid her devotions in storey after storey, and visited every place.

The young pages, who stood outside, watched their old mistress and the other inmates enter the second row of gates. But of a sudden they espied Chia Chen

wend his way outwards, leading a young Taoist priest, and calling the servants to come, say; “Take him and give him several hundreds of cash and abstain from ill-treating him.” At these orders, the domestics approached with hurried step and led him off.

Chia Chen then inquired from the terrace-steps where the majordomo was. At this inquiry, the pages standing below, called out in chorus, “Majordomo!”

Lin Chih-hsiao ran over at once, while adjusting his hat with one hand, and appeared in the presence of Chia Chen.

“Albeit this is a spacious place,” Chia Chen began, “we muster a good concourse to-day, so you’d better bring into this court those servants, who’ll be of any use to you, and send over into that one those who won’t. And choose a few from among those young pages to remain on duty, at the second gate and at the two side entrances, so as to ask for things and deliver messages. Do you understand me, yes or no? The young ladies and ladies have all come out of town to-day, and not a single outsider must be permitted to put his foot in here.”

“I understand,” replied Lin Chih-hsiao hurriedly signifying his obedience. Next he uttered several yes’s.

“Now,” proceeded Chia Chen; “you can go on your way. But how is it, I don’t see anything of Jung Erh?” he went on to ask.

This question was barely out of his lips, when he caught sight of Jung Erh running out of the belfry. “Look at him,” shouted Chia Chen. “Look at him! I don’t feel hot in here, and yet he must go in search of a cool place. Spit at him!” he cried to the family servants.

The young pages were fully aware that Chia Chen’s ordinary disposition was such that he could not brook contradiction, and one of the lads speedily came forward and sputtered in Chia Jung’s face. But Chia Chen still kept his gaze fixed on him, so the young page had to inquire of Chia Jung: “Master doesn’t feel hot here, and how is it that you, Sir, have been the first to go and get cool?”

Chia Jung however dropped his arms, and did not venture to utter a single sound. Chia Yün, Chia P’ing, Chia Ch’in and the other young people overheard what was going on and not only were they scared out of their wits, but even Chia Lien, Chia Pin, Chia Ch’ung and their companions were stricken with intense

fright and one by one they quietly slipped down along the foot of the wall.

“What are you standing there for?” Chia Chen shouted to Chia Jung. “Don’t you yet get on your horse and gallop home and tell your mother that our venerable senior is here with all the young ladies, and bid them come at once and wait upon them?”

As soon as Chia Jung heard these words, he ran out with hurried stride and called out repeatedly for his horse. Now he felt resentment, arguing within himself: “Who knows what he has been up to the whole morning, that he now finds fault with me!” Now he went on to abuse the young servants, crying: “Are your hands made fast, that you can’t lead the horse round?” And he felt inclined to bid a servant-boy go on the errand, but fearing again lest he should subsequently be found out, and be at a loss how to account for his conduct he felt compelled to proceed in person; so mounting his steed, he started on his way.

But to return to Chia Chen. Just as he was about to be take himself inside, he noticed the Taoist Chang, who stood next to him, force a smile. “I’m not properly speaking,” he remarked, “on the same footing as the others and should be in attendance inside, but as on account of the intense heat, the young ladies have come out of doors, I couldn’t presume to take upon myself to intrude and ask what your orders, Sir, are. But the dowager lady may possibly inquire about me, or may like to visit any part of the temple, so I shall wait in here.”

Chia Chen was fully cognisant that this Taoist priest, Chang, had, it is true, in past days, stood as a substitute for the Duke of the Jung Kuo mansion, but that the former Emperor had, with his own lips, conferred upon him the appellation of the ‘Immortal being of the Great Unreal,’ that he held at present the seal of ‘Taoist Superior,’ that the reigning Emperor had raised him to the rank of the ‘Pure man,’ that the princes, now-a-days, dukes, and high officials styled him the “Supernatural being,” and he did not therefore venture to treat him with any disrespect. In the second place, (he knew that) he had paid frequent visits to the mansions, and that he had made the acquaintance of the ladies and young ladies, so when he heard his present remark he smilingly rejoined. “Do you again make use of such language amongst ourselves? One word more, and I’ll take that beard of yours, and outroot it! Don’t you yet come along with me inside?”

“Hah, hah,” laughed the Taoist Chang aloud, as he followed Chia Chen in. Chia Chen approached dowager lady Chia. Bending his body he strained a laugh.

“Grandfather Chang,” he said, “has come in to pay his respects.”

“Raise him up!” old lady Chia vehemently called out.

Chia Chen lost no time in pulling him to his feet and bringing him over.

The Taoist Chang first indulged in loud laughter. “Oh Buddha of unlimited years!” he then observed. “Have you kept all right and in good health, throughout, venerable Senior? Have all the ladies and young ladies continued well? I haven’t been for some time to your mansion to pay my obeisance, but you, my dowager lady, have improved more and more.”

“Venerable Immortal Being!” smiled old lady Chia, “how are you; quite well?”

“Thanks to the ten thousand blessings he has enjoyed from your hands,” rejoined Chang the Taoist, “your servant too continues pretty strong and hale. In every other respect, I’ve, after all, been all right; but I have felt much concern about Mr. Pao-yü. Has he been all right all the time? The other day, on the 26th of the fourth moon, I celebrated the birthday of the ‘Heaven-Pervading-Mighty-King;’ few people came and everything went off right and proper. I told them to invite Mr. Pao to come for a stroll; but how was it they said that he wasn’t at home?”

“It was indeed true that he was away from home,” remarked dowager lady Chia. As she spoke, she turned her head round and called Pao-yü.

Pao-yü had, as it happened, just returned from outside where he had been to make himself comfortable, and with speedy step, he came forward. “My respects to you, grandfather Chang,” he said.

The Taoist Chang eagerly clasped him in his arms and inquired how he was getting on. Turning towards old lady Chia, “Mr. Pao,” he observed, “has grown fatter than ever.”

“Outwardly, his looks,” replied dowager lady Chia, “may be all right, but, inwardly, he is weak. In addition to this, his father presses him so much to study that he has again and again managed, all through this bullying, to make his child fall sick.”

“The other day,” continued Chang the Taoist, “I went to several places on a visit, and saw characters written by Mr. Pao and verses composed by him, all of which

were exceedingly good; so how is it that his worthy father still feels displeased with him, and maintains that Mr. Pao is not very fond of his books? According to my humble idea, he knows quite enough. As I consider Mr. Pao's face, his bearing, his speech and his deportment," he proceeded, heaving a sigh, "what a striking resemblance I find in him to the former duke of the Jung mansion!" As he uttered these words, tears rolled down his cheeks.

At these words, old lady Chia herself found it hard to control her feelings. Her face became covered with the traces of tears. "Quite so," she assented, "I've had ever so many sons and grandsons, and not one of them betrayed the slightest resemblance to his grandfather; and this Pao-yü turns out to be the very image of him!"

"What the former duke of Jung Kuo was like in appearance," Chang, the Taoist went on to remark, addressing himself to Chia Chen, "you gentlemen, and your generation, were, of course, needless to say, not in time to see for yourselves; but I fancy that even our Senior master and our Master Secundus have but a faint recollection of it."

This said, he burst into another loud fit of laughter. "The other day," he resumed, "I was at some one's house and there I met a young girl, who is this year in her fifteenth year, and verily gifted with a beautiful face, and I bethought myself that Mr. Pao must also have a wife found for him. As far as looks, intelligence and mental talents, extraction and family standing go, this maiden is a suitable match for him. But as I didn't know what your venerable ladyship would have to say about it, your servant did not presume to act recklessly, but waited until I could ascertain your wishes before I took upon myself to open my mouth with the parties concerned."

"Some time ago," responded dowager lady Chia, "a bonze explained that it was ordained by destiny that this child shouldn't be married at an early age, and that we should put things off until he grew somewhat in years before anything was settled. But mark my words now. Pay no regard as to whether she be of wealthy and honourable stock or not, the essential thing is to find one whose looks make her a fit match for him and then come at once and tell me. For even admitting that the girl is poor, all I shall have to do will be to bestow on her a few ounces of silver; but fine looks and a sweet temperament are not easy things to come across."

When she had done speaking, lady Feng was heard to smilingly interpose: “Grandfather Chang, aren’t you going to change the talisman of ‘Recorded Name’ of our daughter? The other day, lucky enough for you, you had again the great cheek to send some one to ask me for some satin of gosling-yellow colour. I gave it to you, for had I not, I was afraid lest your old face should have been made to feel uneasy.”

“Hah, hah,” roared the Taoist Chang, “just see how my eyes must have grown dim! I didn’t notice that you, my lady, were in here; nor did I express one word of thanks to you! The talisman of ‘Recorded Name’ is ready long ago. I meant to have sent it over the day before yesterday, but the unforeseen visit of the Empress to perform meritorious deeds upset my equilibrium, and made me quite forget it. But it’s still placed before the gods, and if you will wait I’ll go and fetch it.”

Saying this, he rushed into the main hall. Presently, he returned with a tea-tray in hand, on which was spread a deep red satin cover, brocaded with dragons. In this, he presented the charm. Ta Chieh-erh’s nurse took it from him.

But just as the Taoist was on the point of taking Ta Chieh-erh in his embrace, lady Feng remarked with a smile: “It would have been sufficient if you’d carried it in your hand! And why use a tray to lay it on?”

“My hands aren’t clean,” replied the Taoist Chang, “so how could I very well have taken hold of it? A tray therefore made things much cleaner!”

“When you produced that tray just now,” laughed lady Feng, “you gave me quite a start; I didn’t imagine that it was for the purpose of bringing the charm in. It really looked as if you were disposed to beg donations of us.”

This observation sent the whole company into a violent fit of laughter. Even Chia Chen could not suppress a smile.

“What a monkey!” dowager lady Chia exclaimed, turning her head round. “What a monkey you are! Aren’t you afraid of going down to that Hell, where tongues are cut off?”

“I’ve got nothing to do with any men whatever,” rejoined lady Feng laughing, “and why does he time and again tell me that it’s my bounden duty to lay up a store of meritorious deeds; and that if I’m remiss, my life will be short?”

Chang, the Taoist, indulged in further laughter. “I brought out,” he explained, “the tray so as to kill two birds with one stone. It wasn’t, however, to beg for donations. On the contrary, it was in order to put in it the jade, which I meant to ask Mr. Pao to take off, so as to carry it outside and let all those Taoist friends of mine, who come from far away, as well as my neophytes and the young apprentices, see what it’s like.”

“Well, since that be the case,” added old lady Chia, “why do you, at your age, try your strength by running about the whole day long? Take him at once along and let them see it! But were you to have called him in there, wouldn’t it have saved a lot of trouble?”

“Your venerable ladyship,” resumed Chang, the Taoist, “isn’t aware that though I be, to look at, a man of eighty, I, after all, continue, thanks to your protection, my dowager lady, quite hale and strong. In the second place, there are crowds of people in the outer rooms; and the smells are not agreeable. Besides it’s a very hot day and Mr. Pao couldn’t stand the heat as he is not accustomed to it. So were he to catch any disease from the filthy odours, it would be a grave thing!”

After these forebodings old lady Chia accordingly desired Pao-yü to unclasp the jade of Spiritual Perception, and to deposit it in the tray. The Taoist, Chang, carefully ensconced it in the folds of the wrapper, embroidered with dragons, and left the room, supporting the tray with both his hands.

During this while, dowager lady Chia and the other inmates devoted more of their time in visiting the various places. But just as they were on the point of going up the two-storied building, they heard Chia Chen shout: “Grandfather Chang has brought back the jade.”

As he spoke, the Taoist Chang was seen advancing up to them, the tray in hand. “The whole company,” he smiled, “were much obliged to me. They think Mr. Pao’s jade really lovely! None of them have, however, any suitable gifts to bestow. These are religious articles, used by each of them in propagating the doctrines of Reason, but they’re all only too ready to give them as congratulatory presents. If, Mr. Pao, you don’t fancy them for anything else, just keep them to play with or to give away to others.”

Dowager lady Chia, at these words, looked into the tray. She discovered that its contents consisted of gold signets, and jade rings, or sceptres, implying: “may

you have your wishes accomplished in everything," or "may you enjoy peace and health from year to year;" that the various articles were strung with pearls or inlaid with precious stones, worked in jade or mounted in gold; and that they were in all from thirty to fifty.

"What nonsense you're talking!" she then exclaimed. "Those people are all divines, and where could they have rummaged up these things? But what need is there for any such presents? He may, on no account, accept them."

"These are intended as a small token of their esteem," responded Chang, the Taoist, smiling, "your servant cannot therefore venture to interfere with them. If your venerable ladyship will not keep them, won't you make it patent to them that I'm treated contemptuously, and unlike what one should be, who has joined the order through your household?"

Only when old lady Chia heard these arguments did she direct a servant to receive the presents.

"Venerable senior," Pao-yü smilingly chimed in. "After the reasons advanced by grandfather Chang, we cannot possibly refuse them. But albeit I feel disposed to keep these things, they are of no avail to me; so would it not be well were a servant told to carry the tray and to follow me out of doors, that I may distribute them to the poor?

"You are perfectly right in what you say!" smiled dowager lady Chia.

The Taoist Chang, however, went on speedily to use various arguments to dissuade him. "Mr. Pao," he observed, "your intention is, it is true, to perform charitable acts; but though you may aver that these things are of little value, you'll nevertheless find among them several articles you might turn to some account. Were you to let the beggars have them, why they will, first of all, be none the better for them; and, next, it will contrariwise be tantamount to throwing them away! If you want to distribute anything among the poor, why don't you dole out cash to them?"

"Put them by!" promptly shouted Pao-yü, after this rejoinder, "and when evening comes, take a few cash and distribute them."

These directions given, Chang, the Taoist, retired out of the place.

Dowager lady Chia and her companions thereupon walked upstairs and sat in the main part of the building. Lady Feng and her friends adjourned into the eastern part, while the waiting-maids and servants remained in the western portion, and took their turns in waiting on their mistresses.

Before long, Chia Chen came back. “The plays,” he announced, “have been chosen by means of slips picked out before the god. The first one on the list is the ‘Record of the White Snake.’”

“Of what kind of old story does ‘the record of the white snake,’ treat?” old lady Chia inquired.

“The story about Han Kao-tsu,” replied Chia Chen, “killing a snake and then ascending the throne. The second play is, ‘the Bed covered with ivory tablets.’”

“Has this been assigned the second place?” asked dowager lady Chia. “Yet never mind; for as the gods will it thus, there is no help than not to demur. But what about the third play?” she went on to inquire.

“The Nan Ko dream is the third,” Chia Chen answered.

This response elicited no comment from dowager lady Chia. Chia Chen therefore withdrew downstairs, and betook himself outside to make arrangements for the offerings to the gods, for the paper money and eatables that had to be burnt, and for the theatricals about to begin. So we will leave him without any further allusion, and take up our narrative with Pao-yü.

Seating himself upstairs next to old lady Chia, he called to a servant-girl to fetch the tray of presents given to him a short while back, and putting on his own trinket of jade, he fumbled about with the things for a bit, and picking up one by one, he handed them to his grandmother to admire. But old lady Chia espied among them a unicorn, made of purplish gold, with kingfisher feathers inserted, and eagerly extending her arm, she took it up. “This object,” she smiled, “seems to me to resemble very much one I’ve seen worn also by the young lady of some household or other of ours.”

“Senior cousin, Shih Hsiang-yün,” chimed in Pao-ch’ai, a smile playing on her lips, “has one, but it’s a trifle smaller than this.”

“Is it indeed Yün-erh who has it?” exclaimed old lady Chia.

“Now that she lives in our house,” remarked Pao-yü, “how is it that even I haven’t seen anything of it?”

“Cousin Pao-ch’ai,” rejoined T’an Ch’un laughingly, “has the power of observation; no matter what she sees, she remembers.”

Lin Tai-yü gave a sardonic smile. “As far as other matters are concerned,” she insinuated, “her observation isn’t worth speaking of; where she’s extra-observant is in articles people may wear about their persons.”

Pao-chai, upon catching this sneering remark, at once turned her head round, and pretended she had not heard. But as soon as Pao-yü learnt that Shih Hsiang-yün possessed a similar trinket, he speedily picked up the unicorn, and hid it in his breast, indulging, at the same time, in further reflection. Yet, fearing lest people might have noticed that he kept back that particular thing the moment he discovered that Shih Hsiang-yün had one identical with it, he fixed his eyes intently upon all around while clutching it. He found however that not one of them was paying any heed to his movements except Lin Tai-yü, who, while gazing at him was, nodding her head, as if with the idea of expressing her admiration. Pao-yü, therefore, at once felt inwardly ill at ease, and pulling out his hand, he observed, addressing himself to Tai-yü with an assumed smile, “This is really a fine thing to play with; I’ll keep it for you, and when we get back home, I’ll pass a ribbon through it for you to wear.” “I don’t care about it,” said Lin Tai-yü, giving her head a sudden twist.

“Well,” continued Pao-yü laughingly, “if you don’t like it, I can’t do otherwise than keep it myself.”

Saying this, he once again thrust it away. But just as he was about to open his lips to make some other observation, he saw Mrs. Yu, the spouse of Chia Chen, arrive along with the second wife recently married by Chia Jung, that is, his mother and her daughter-in-law, to pay their obeisance to dowager lady Chia.

“What do you people rush over here for again?” old lady Chia inquired.

“I came here for a turn, simply because I had nothing to do.”

But no sooner was this inquiry concluded than they heard a messenger announce: “that some one had come from the house of general Feng.”

The family of Feng Tzu-ying had, it must be explained, come to learn the news that the inmates of the Chia mansion were offering a thanksgiving service in the temple, and, without loss of time, they got together presents of pigs, sheep, candles, tea and eatables and sent them over. The moment lady Feng heard about it she hastily crossed to the main part of the two-storied building. “Ai-ya;” she ejaculated, clapping her hands and laughing. “I never expected anything of the sort; we merely said that we ladies were coming for a leisurely stroll and people imagined that we were spreading a sumptuous altar with lenten viands and came to bring us offerings! But it’s all our old lady’s fault for bruiting it about! Why, we haven’t even got any slips of paper with tips ready.”

She had just finished speaking, when she perceived two matrons, who acted as housekeepers in the Feng family, walk upstairs. But before the Feng servants could take their leave, presents likewise arrived, in quick succession, from Chao, the Vice-President of the Board. In due course, one lot of visitors followed another. For as every one got wind of the fact that the Chia family was having thanksgiving services, and that the ladies were in the temple, distant and close relatives, friends, old friends and acquaintances all came to present their contributions. So much so, that dowager lady Chia began at this juncture to feel sorry that she had ever let the cat out of the bag. “This is no regular fasting,” she said, “we simply have come for a little change; and we should not have put any one to any inconvenience!” Although therefore she was to have remained present all day at the theatrical performance, she promptly returned home soon after noon, and the next day she felt very loth to go out of doors again.

“By striking the wall, we’ve also stirred up dust,” lady Feng argued. “Why we’ve already put those people to the trouble so we should only be too glad to-day to have another outing.”

But as when dowager lady Chia interviewed the Taoist Chang, the previous day, he made allusion to Pao-yü and canvassed his engagement, Pao-yü experienced, little as one would have thought it, much secret displeasure during the whole of that day, and on his return home he flew into a rage and abused Chang, the rationalistic priest, for harbouring designs to try and settle a match for him. At every breath and at every word he resolved that henceforward he would not set eyes again upon the Taoist Chang. But no one but himself had any idea of the reason that actuated him to absent himself. In the next place, Lin Tai-yü began also, on her return the day before, to ail from a touch of the sun, so their grandmother was induced by these two considerations to remain firm in her

decision not to go. When lady Feng, however, found that she would not join them, she herself took charge of the family party and set out on the excursion.

But without descending to particulars, let us advert to Pao-yü. Seeing that Lin Tai-yü had fallen ill, he was so full of solicitude on her account that he even had little thought for any of his meals, and not long elapsed before he came to inquire how she was.

Tai-yü, on her part, gave way to fear lest anything should happen to him, (and she tried to reassure him). “Just go and look at the plays,” she therefore replied, “what’s the use of boxing yourself up at home?”

Pao-yü was, however, not in a very happy frame of mind on account of the reference to his marriage made by Chang, the Taoist, the day before, so when he heard Lin Tai-yü‘s utterances: “If others don’t understand me;” he mused, “it’s anyhow excusable; but has she too begun to make fun of me?” His heart smarted in consequence under the sting of a mortification a hundred times keener than he had experienced up to that occasion. Had he been with any one else, it would have been utterly impossible for her to have brought into play feelings of such resentment, but as it was no other than Tai-yü who spoke the words, the impression produced upon him was indeed different from that left in days gone by, when others employed similar language. Unable to curb his feelings, he instantaneously lowered his face. “My friendship with you has been of no avail” he rejoined. “But, never mind, patience!”

This insinuation induced Lin Tai-yü to smile a couple of sarcastic smiles. “Yes, your friendship with me has been of no avail,” she repeated; “for how can I compare with those whose manifold qualities make them fit matches for you?”

As soon as this sneer fell on Pao-yü‘s ear he drew near to her. “Are you by telling me this,” he asked straight to her face, “deliberately bent upon invoking imprecations upon me that I should be annihilated by heaven and extinguished by earth?”

Lin Tai-yü could not for a time fathom the import of his remarks. “It was,” Pao-yü then resumed, “on account of this very conversation that I yesterday swore several oaths, and now would you really make me repeat another one? But were the heavens to annihilate me and the earth to extinguish me, what benefit would you derive?”

This rejoinder reminded Tai-yü of the drift of their conversation on the previous day. And as indeed she had on this occasion framed in words those sentiments, which should not have dropped from her lips, she experienced both annoyance and shame, and she tremulously observed: “If I entertain any deliberate intention to bring any harm upon you, may I too be destroyed by heaven and exterminated by earth! But what’s the use of all this! I know very well that the allusion to marriage made yesterday by Chang, the Taoist, fills you with dread lest he might interfere with your choice. You are inwardly so irate that you come and treat me as your malignant influence.”

Pao-yü, the fact is, had ever since his youth developed a peculiar kind of mean and silly propensity. Having moreover from tender infancy grown up side by side with Tai-Yü, their hearts and their feelings were in perfect harmony. More, he had recently come to know to a great extent what was what, and had also filled his head with the contents of a number of corrupt books and licentious stories. Of all the eminent and beautiful girls that he had met too in the families of either distant or close relatives or of friends, not one could reach the standard of Lin Tai-yü. Hence it was that he commenced, from an early period of his life, to foster sentiments of love for her; but as he could not very well give utterance to them, he felt time and again sometimes elated, sometimes vexed, and wont to exhaust every means to secretly subject her heart to a test.

Lin Tai-yü happened, on the other hand, to possess in like manner a somewhat silly disposition; and she too frequently had recourse to feigned sentiments to feel her way. And as she began to conceal her true feelings and inclinations and to simply dissimulate, and he to conceal his true sentiments and wishes and to dissemble, the two unrealities thus blending together constituted eventually one reality. But it was hardly to be expected that trifles would not be the cause of tiffs between them. Thus it was that in Pao-yü‘s mind at this time prevailed the reflection: “that were others unable to read my feelings, it would anyhow be excusable; but is it likely that you cannot realise that in my heart and in my eyes there is no one else besides yourself. But as you were not able to do anything to dispel my annoyance, but made use, instead, of the language you did to laugh at me, and to gag my mouth, it’s evident that though you hold, at every second and at every moment, a place in my heart, I don’t, in fact, occupy a place in yours.” Such was the construction attached to her conduct by Pao-yü, yet he did not have the courage to tax her with it.

“If, really, I hold a place in your heart,” Lin Tai-yü again reflected, “why do you,

albeit what's said about gold and jade being a fit match, attach more importance to this perverse report and think nothing of what I say? Did you, when I so often broach the subject of this gold and jade, behave as if you, verily, had never heard anything about it, I would then have seen that you treat me with preference and that you don't harbour the least particle of a secret design. But how is it that the moment I allude to the topic of gold and jade, you at once lose all patience? This is proof enough that you are continuously pondering over that gold and jade, and that as soon as you hear me speak to you about them, you apprehend that I shall once more give way to conjectures, and intentionally pretend to be quite out of temper, with the deliberate idea of cajoling me!"

These two cousins had, to all appearances, once been of one and the same mind, but the many issues, which had sprung up between them, brought about a contrary result and made them of two distinct minds.

"I don't care what you do, everything is well," Pao-yü further argued, "so long as you act up to your feelings; and if you do, I shall be ever only too willing to even suffer immediate death for your sake. Whether you know this or not, doesn't matter; it's all the same. Yet were you to just do as my heart would have you, you'll afford me a clear proof that you and I are united by close ties and that you are no stranger to me!"

"Just you mind your own business," Lin Tai-yü on her side cogitated. "If you will treat me well, I'll treat you well. And what need is there to put an end to yourself for my sake? Are you not aware that if you kill yourself, I'll also kill myself? But this demonstrates that you don't wish me to be near to you, and that you really want that I should be distant to you."

It will thus be seen that the desire, by which they were both actuated, to strive and draw each other close and ever closer became contrariwise transformed into a wish to become more distant. But as it is no easy task to frame into words the manifold secret thoughts entertained by either, we will now confine ourselves to a consideration of their external manner.

The three words "a fine match," which Pao-yü heard again Lin Tai-yü pronounce proved so revolting to him that his heart got full of disgust and he was unable to give utterance to a single syllable. Losing all control over his temper, he snatched from his neck the jade of Spiritual Perception and, clenching his teeth, he spitefully dashed it down on the floor. "What rubbishy trash!" he cried. "I'll

smash you to atoms and put an end to the whole question!”

The jade, however, happened to be of extraordinary hardness, and did not, after all, sustain the slightest injury from this single fall. When Pao-yü realised that it had not broken, he forthwith turned himself round to get the trinket with the idea of carrying out his design of smashing it, but Tai-yü divined his intention, and soon started crying. “What’s the use of all this!” she demurred, “and why, pray, do you batter that dumb thing about? Instead of smashing it, wouldn’t it be better for you to come and smash me!”

But in the middle of their dispute, Tzu Chüan, Hsüeh Yen and the other maids promptly interfered and quieted them. Subsequently, however, they saw how deliberately bent Pao-yü was upon breaking the jade, and they vehemently rushed up to him to snatch it from his hands. But they failed in their endeavours, and perceiving that he was getting more troublesome than he had ever been before, they had no alternative but to go and call Hsi Jen. Hsi Jen lost no time in running over and succeeded, at length, in getting hold of the trinket.

“I’m smashing what belongs to me,” remarked Pao-yü with a cynical smile, “and what has that to do with you people?”

Hsi Jen noticed that his face had grown quite sallow from anger, that his eyes had assumed a totally unusual expression, and that he had never hitherto had such a fit of ill-temper and she hastened to take his hand in hers and to smilingly expostulate with him. “If you’ve had a tiff with your cousin,” she said, “it isn’t worth while flinging this down! Had you broken it, how would her heart and face have been able to bear the mortification?”

Lin Tai-yü shed tears and listened the while to her remonstrances. Yet these words, which so corresponded with her own feelings, made it clear to her that Pao-yü could not even compare with Hsi Jen and wounded her heart so much more to the quick that she began to weep aloud. But the moment she got so vexed she found it hard to keep down the potion of boletus and the decoction, for counteracting the effects of the sun, she had taken only a few minutes back, and with a retch she brought everything up. Tzu Chüan immediately pressed to her side and used her handkerchief to stop her mouth with. But mouthful succeeded mouthful, and in no time the handkerchief was soaked through and through.

Hsüeh Yen then approached in a hurry and tapped her on the back.

“You may, of course, give way to displeasure,” Tzu Chüan argued; “but you should, after all, take good care of yourself Miss. You had just taken the medicines and felt the better for them; and here you now begin vomitting again; and all because you’ve had a few words with our master Secundus. But should your complaint break out afresh how will Mr. Pao bear the blow?”

The moment Pao-yü caught this advice, which accorded so thoroughly with his own ideas, he found how little Tai-yü could hold her own with Tzu Chüan. And perceiving how flushed Tai-yü‘s face was, how her temples were swollen, how, while sobbing, she panted; and how, while crying, she was suffused with perspiration, and betrayed signs of extreme weakness, he began, at the sight of her condition, to reproach himself. “I shouldn’t,” he reflected, “have bandied words with her; for now that she’s got into this frame of mind, I mayn’t even suffer in her stead!”

The self-reproaches, however, which gnawed his heart made it impossible for him to refrain from tears, much as he fought against them. Hsi Jen saw them both crying, and while attending to Pao-yü, she too unavoidably experienced much soreness of heart. She nevertheless went on rubbing Pao-yü‘s hands, which were icy cold. She felt inclined to advise Pao-yü not to weep, but fearing again lest, in the first place, Pao-yü might be inwardly aggrieved, and nervous, in the next, lest she should not be dealing rightly by Tai-yü, she thought it advisable that they should all have a good cry, as they might then be able to leave off. She herself therefore also melted into tears. As for Tzu-Chüan, at one time, she cleaned the expectorated medicine; at another, she took up a fan and gently fanned Tai-yü. But at the sight of the trio plunged in perfect silence, and of one and all sobbing for reasons of their own, grief, much though she did to struggle against it, mastered her feelings too, and producing a handkerchief, she dried the tears that came to her eyes. So there stood four inmates, face to face, uttering not a word and indulging in weeping.

Shortly, Hsi Jen made a supreme effort, and smilingly said to Pao-yü: “If you don’t care for anything else, you should at least have shown some regard for those tassels, strung on the jade, and not have wrangled with Miss Lin.”

Tai-yü heard these words, and, mindless of her indisposition, she rushed over, and snatching the trinket, she picked up a pair of scissors, lying close at hand, bent upon cutting the tassels. Hsi Jen and Tzu Chüan were on the point of wresting it from her, but she had already managed to mangle them into several

pieces.

“I have,” sobbed Tai-yü, “wasted my energies on them for nothing; for he doesn’t prize them. He’s certain to find others to string some more fine tassels for him.”

Hsi Jen promptly took the jade. “Is it worth while going on in this way!” she cried. “But this is all my fault for having blabbered just now what should have been left unsaid.”

“Cut it, if you like!” chimed in Pao-yü, addressing himself to Tai-yü. “I will on no account wear it, so it doesn’t matter a rap.”

But while all they minded inside was to create this commotion, they little dreamt that the old matrons had descried Tai-yü weep bitterly and vomit copiously, and Pao-yü again dash his jade on the ground, and that not knowing how far the excitement might not go, and whether they themselves might not become involved, they had repaired in a body to the front, and reported the occurrence to dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, their object being to try and avoid being themselves implicated in the matter. Their old mistress and Madame Wang, seeing them make so much of the occurrence as to rush with precipitate haste to bring it to their notice, could not in the least imagine what great disaster might not have befallen them, and without loss of time they betook themselves together into the garden and came to see what the two cousins were up to.

Hsi Jen felt irritated and harboured resentment against Tzu Chüan, unable to conceive what business she had to go and disturb their old mistress and Madame Wang. But Tzu Chüan, on the other hand, presumed that it was Hsi Jen, who had gone and reported the matter to them, and she too cherished angry feelings towards Hsi Jen.

Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang walked into the apartment. They found Pao-yü on one side saying not a word. Lin Tai-yü on the other uttering not a sound. “What’s up again?” they asked. But throwing the whole blame upon the shoulders of Hsi Jen and Tzu Chüan, “why is it,” they inquired, “that you were not diligent in your attendance on them. They now start a quarrel, and don’t you exert yourselves in the least to restrain them?”

Therefore with obloquy and hard words they rated the two girls for a time in such a way that neither of them could put in a word by way of reply, but felt

compelled to listen patiently. And it was only after dowager lady Chia had taken Pao-yü away with her that things quieted down again.

One day passed. Then came the third of the moon. This was Hsüeh Pan's birthday, so in their house a banquet was spread and preparations made for a performance; and to these the various inmates of the Chia mansion went. But as Pao-yü had so hurt Tai-yü's feelings, the two cousins saw nothing whatever of each other, and conscience-stricken, despondent and unhappy, as he was at this time could he have had any inclination to be present at the plays? Hence it was that he refused to go on the pretext of indisposition.

Lin Tai-yü had got, a couple of days back, but a slight touch of the sun and naturally there was nothing much the matter with her. When the news however reached her that he did not intend to join the party, "If with his weakness for wine and for theatricals," she pondered within herself, "he now chooses to stay away, instead of going, why, that quarrel with me yesterday must be at the bottom of it all. If this isn't the reason, well then it must be that he has no wish to attend, as he sees that I'm not going either. But I should on no account have cut the tassels from that jade, for I feel sure he won't wear it again. I shall therefore have to string some more on to it, before he puts it on."

On this account the keenest remorse gnawed her heart.

Dowager lady Chia saw well enough that they were both under the influence of temper. "We should avail ourselves of this occasion," she said to herself, "to go over and look at the plays, and as soon as the two young people come face to face, everything will be squared." Contrary to her expectations neither of them would volunteer to go. This so exasperated their old grandmother that she felt vexed with them. "In what part of my previous existence could an old sufferer like myself," she exclaimed, "have incurred such retribution that my destiny is to come across these two troublesome new-fledged foes! Why, not a single day goes by without their being instrumental in worrying my mind! The proverb is indeed correct which says: 'that people who are not enemies are not brought together!' But shortly my eyes shall be closed, this breath of mine shall be snapped, and those two enemies will be free to cause trouble even up to the very skies; for as my eyes will then loose their power of vision, and my heart will be void of concern, it will really be nothing to me. But I couldn't very well stifle this breath of life of mine!"

While inwardly a prey to resentment, she also melted into tears.

These words were brought to the ears of Pao-yü and Tai-yü. Neither of them had hitherto heard the adage: “people who are not enemies are not brought together,” so when they suddenly got to know the line, it seemed as if they had apprehended abstraction. Both lowered their heads and meditated on the subtle sense of the saying. But unconsciously a stream of tears rolled down their cheeks. They could not, it is true, get a glimpse of each other; yet as the one was in the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, standing in the breeze, bedewed with tears, and the other in the I Hung court, facing the moon and heaving deep sighs, was it not, in fact, a case of two persons living in two distinct places, yet with feelings emanating from one and the same heart?

Hsi Jen consequently tendered advice to Pao-yü. “You’re a million times to blame,” she said, “it’s you who are entirely at fault! For when some time ago the pages in the establishment, wrangled with their sisters, or when husband and wife fell out, and you came to hear anything about it, you blew up the lads, and called them fools for not having the heart to show some regard to girls; and now here you go and follow their lead. But tomorrow is the fifth day of the moon, a great festival, and will you two still continue like this, as if you were very enemies? If so, our venerable mistress will be the more angry, and she certainly will be driven sick! I advise you therefore to do what’s right by suppressing your spite and confessing your fault, so that we should all be on the same terms as hitherto. You here will then be all right, and so will she over there.”

Pao-yü listened to what she had to say; but whether he fell in with her views or not is not yet ascertained; yet if you, reader, choose to know, we will explain in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXX.

Pao-ch’ai avails herself of the excuse afforded her by a fan to administer a couple of raps. While Ch’un Ling traces, in a absent frame of mind, the outlines of the character Ch’iang, a looker-on appears on the scene.

Lin Tai-yü herself, for we will now resume our narrative, was also, ever since

her tiff with Pao-yü, full of self-condemnation, yet as she did not see why she should run after him, she continued, day and night, as despondent as she would have been had she lost some thing or other belonging to her.

Tzu Chüan surmised her sentiments. “As regards what happened the other day,” she advised her, “you were, after all, Miss, a little too hasty; for if others don’t understand that temperament of Pao-yü‘s, have you and I, surely, also no idea about it? Besides, haven’t there been already one or two rows on account of that very jade?”

“Ts’ui!” exclaimed Tai-yü. “Have you come, on behalf of others, to find fault with me? But how ever was I hasty?”

“Why did you,” smiled Tzu Chüan, “take the scissors and cut that tassel when there was no good reason for it? So isn’t Pao-yü less to blame than yourself, Miss? I’ve always found his behaviour towards you, Miss, without a fault. It’s all that touchy disposition of yours, which makes you so often perverse, that induces him to act as he does.”

Lin Tai-yü had every wish to make some suitable reply, when she heard some one calling at the door. Tzu Chüan discerned the tone of voice. “This sounds like Pao-yü‘s voice,” she smiled. “I expect he’s come to make his apologies.”

“I won’t have any one open the door,” Tai-yü cried at these words.

“Here you are in the wrong again, Miss,” Tzu Chüan observed. “How will it ever do to let him get a sunstroke and come to some harm on a day like this, and under such a scorching sun?”

Saying this, she speedily walked out and opened the door. It was indeed Pao-yü. While ushering him in, she gave him a smile. “I imagined,” she said, “that you would never again put your foot inside our door, Master Secundus. But here you are once more and quite unexpectedly!”

“You have by dint of talking,” Pao-yü laughed, “made much ado of nothing; and why shouldn’t I come, when there’s no reason for me to keep away? Were I even to die, my spirit too will come a hundred times a day! But is cousin quite well?”

“She is,” replied Tzu Chüan, “physically all right; but, mentally, her resentment is not quite over.”

“I understand,” continued Pao-yü with a smile. “But resentment, for what?”

With this inquiry, he wended his steps inside the apartment. He then caught sight of Lin Tai-yü reclining on the bed in the act of crying. Tai-yü had not in fact shed a tear, but hearing Pao-yü break in upon her, she could not help feeling upset. She found it impossible therefore to prevent her tears from rolling down her cheeks.

Pao-yü assumed a smiling expression and drew near the bed. “Cousin, are you quite well again?” he inquired.

Tai-yü simply went on drying her tears, and made no reply of any kind.

Pao-yü approached the bed, and sat on the edge of it. “I know,” he smiled, “that you’re not vexed with me. But had I not come, third parties would have been allowed to notice my absence, and it would have appeared to them as if we had had another quarrel. And had I to wait until they came to reconcile us, would we not by that time become perfect strangers? It would be better, supposing you wish to beat me or blow me up, that you should please yourself and do so now; but whatever you do, don’t give me the cold shoulder!”

Continuing, he proceeded to call her “my dear cousin” for several tens of times.

Tai-yü had resolved not to pay any more heed to Pao-yü. When she, however, now heard Pao-yü urge: “don’t let us allow others to know anything about our having had a quarrel, as it will look as if we had become thorough strangers,” it once more became evident to her, from this single remark, that she was really dearer and nearer to him than any of the other girls, so she could not refrain from saying sobbingly: “You needn’t have come to chaff me! I couldn’t presume henceforward to be on friendly terms with you, Master Secundus! You should treat me as if I were gone!”

At these words, Pao-yü gave way to laughter. “Where are you off to?” he inquired.

“I’m going back home,” answered Tai-yü.

“I’ll go along with you then,” smiled Pao-yü.

“But if I die?” asked Tai-yü.

“Well, if you die,” rejoined Pao-yü, “I’ll become a bonze.”

The moment Tai-yü caught this reply, she hung down her head. “You must, I presume, be bent upon dying?” she cried. “But what stuff and nonsense is this you’re talking? You’ve got so many beloved elder and younger cousins in your family, and how many bodies will you have to go and become bonzes, when by and bye they all pass away! But tomorrow I’ll tell them about this to judge for themselves what your motives are!”

Pao-yü was himself aware of the fact that this rejoinder had been recklessly spoken, and he was seized with regret. His face immediately became suffused with blushes. He lowered his head and had not the courage to utter one word more. Fortunately, however, there was no one present in the room.

Tai-yü stared at him for ever so long with eyes fixed straight on him, but losing control over her temper, “Ai!” she shouted, “can’t you speak?” Then when she perceived Pao-yü reduced to such straits as to turn purple, she clenched her teeth and spitefully gave him, on the forehead, a fillip with her finger. “Heug!” she cried gnashing her teeth, “you, this……” But just as she had pronounced these two words, she heaved another sigh, and picking up her handkerchief, she wiped her tears.

Pao-yü treasured at one time numberless tender things in his mind, which he meant to tell her, but feeling also, while he smarted under the sting of self-reproach (for the indiscretion he had committed), Tai-yü give him a rap, he was utterly powerless to open his lips, much though he may have liked to speak, so he kept on sighing and snivelling to himself. With all these things therefore to work upon his feelings, he unwillingly melted into tears. He tried to find his handkerchief to dry his face with, but unexpectedly discovering that he had again forgotten to bring one with him, he was about to make his coat-sleeve answer the purpose, when Tai-yü, albeit her eyes were watery, noticed at a glance that he was going to use the brand-new coat of grey coloured gauze he wore, and while wiping her own, she turned herself round, and seized a silk kerchief thrown over the pillow, and thrust it into Pao-yü‘s lap. But without saying a word, she screened her face and continued sobbing.

Pao-yü saw the handkerchief she threw, and hastily snatching it, he wiped his tears. Then drawing nearer to her, he put out his hand and clasped her hand in his, and smilingly said to her: “You’ve completely lacerated my heart, and do

you still cry? But let’s go; I’ll come along with you and see our venerable grandmother.”

Tai-yü thrust his hand aside. “Who wants to go hand in hand with you?” she cried. “Here we grow older day after day, but we’re still so full of brazen-faced effrontery that we don’t even know what right means?”

But scarcely had she concluded before she heard a voice say aloud: “They’re all right!”

Pao-yü and Tai-yü were little prepared for this surprise, and they were startled out of their senses. Turning round to see who it was, they caught sight of lady Feng running in, laughing and shouting. “Our old lady,” she said, “is over there, giving way to anger against heaven and earth. She would insist upon my coming to find out whether you were reconciled or not. ‘There’s no need for me to go and see,’ I told her, ‘they will before the expiry of three days, be friends again of their own accord.’ Our venerable ancestor, however, called me to account, and maintained that I was lazy; so here I come! But my words have in very deed turned out true. I don’t see why you two should always be wrangling! For three days you’re on good terms and for two on bad. You become more and more like children. And here you are now hand in hand blubbering! But why did you again yesterday become like black-eyed fighting cocks? Don’t you yet come with me to see your grandmother and make an old lady like her set her mind at ease a bit?”

While reproaching them, she clutched Tai-yü‘s hand and was trudging away, when Tai-yü turned her head round and called out for her servant-girls. But not one of them was in attendance.

“What do you want them for again?” lady Feng asked. “I am here to wait on you!”

Still speaking, she pulled her along on their way, with Pao-yü following in their footsteps. Then making their exit out of the garden gate, they entered dowager lady Chia’s suite of rooms. “I said that it was superfluous for any one to trouble,” lady Feng smiled, “as they were sure of themselves to become reconciled; but you, dear ancestor, so little believed it that you insisted upon my going to act the part of mediator. Yet when I got there, with the intention of inducing them to make it up, I found them, though one did not expect it, in each

other's company, confessing their faults, and laughing and chatting. Just like a yellow eagle clutching the feet of a kite were those two hanging on to each other. So where was the necessity for any one to go?"

These words evoked laughter from every one in the room. Pao-ch'ai, however, was present at the time so Lin Tai-yü did not retort, but went and ensconced herself in a seat near her grandmother.

When Pao-yü noticed that no one had anything to say, he smilingly addressed himself to Pao-ch'ai. "On cousin Hsüeh P'an's birthday," he remarked, "I happened again to be unwell, so not only did I not send him any presents, but I failed to go and knock my head before him. Yet cousin knows nothing about my having been ill, and it will seem to him that I had no wish to go, and that I brought forward excuses so as to avoid paying him a visit. If tomorrow you find any leisure, cousin, do therefore explain matters for me to him."

"This is too much punctiliousness!" smiled Pao-ch'ai. "Even had you insisted upon going, we wouldn't have been so arrogant as to let you put yourself to the trouble, and how much less when you were not feeling well? You two are cousins and are always to be found together the whole day; if you encourage such ideas, some estrangement will, after all, arise between you."

"Cousin," continued Pao-yü smilingly, "you know what to say; and so long as you're lenient with me all will be all right. But how is it," he went on to ask, "that you haven't gone over to see the theatricals?"

"I couldn't stand the heat" rejoined Pao-ch'ai. "I looked on while two plays were being sung, but I found it so intensely hot, that I felt anxious to retire. But the visitors not having dispersed, I had to give as an excuse that I wasn't feeling up to the mark, and so came away at once."

Pao-yü, at these words, could not but feel ill at ease. All he could do was to feign another smile. "It's no wonder," he observed, "that they compare you, cousin, to Yang Kuei-fei; for she too was fat and afraid of hot weather."

Hearing this, Pao-ch'ai involuntarily flew into a violent rage. Yet when about to call him to task, she found that it would not be nice for her to do so. After some reflection, the colour rushed to her cheeks. Smiling ironically twice, "I may resemble," she said, "Yang Kuei-fei, but there's not one of you young men, whether senior or junior, good enough to play the part of Yang Kuo-chung."

While they were bandying words, a servant-girl Ch’ing Erh, lost sight of her fan and laughingly remarked to Pao-ch’ai: “It must be you, Miss Pao, who have put my fan away somewhere or other; dear mistress, do let me have it!”

“You’d better be mindful!” rejoined Pao-ch’ai, shaking her finger at her. “With whom have I ever been up to jokes, that you come and suspect me? Have I hitherto laughed and smirked with you? There’s that whole lot of girls, go and ask them about it!”

At this suggestion, Ch’ing Erh made her escape.

The consciousness then burst upon Pao-yü, that he had again been inconsiderate in his speech, in the presence of so many persons, and he was overcome by a greater sense of shame than when, a short while back, he had been speaking with Lin Tai-yü. Precipitately turning himself round, he went, therefore, and talked to the others as well.

The sight of Pao-yü poking fun at Pao-ch'ai gratified Tai-yü immensely. She was just about to put in her word and also seize the opportunity of chaffing her, but as Ch'ing Erh unawares asked for her fan and Pao-ch'ai added a few more remarks, she at once changed her purpose. "Cousin Pao-ch'ai," she inquired, "what two plays did you hear?"

Pao-ch'ai caught the expression of gratification in Tai-yü's countenance, and concluded that she had for a certainty heard the raillery recently indulged in by Pao-yü and that it had fallen in with her own wishes; and hearing her also suddenly ask the question she did, she answered with a significant laugh: "What I saw was: 'Li Kuei blows up Sung Chiang and subsequently again tenders his apologies'."

Pao-yü smiled. "How is it," he said, "that with such wide knowledge of things new as well as old; and such general information as you possess, you aren't even up to the name of a play, and that you've come out with such a whole string of words. Why, the real name of the play is: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'".

"Is it truly called: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'"? Pao-ch'ai asked with laugh. "But you people know all things new and old so are able to understand the import of 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment.' As for me I've no idea whatever what 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment' implies."

One sentence was scarcely ended when Pao-yü and Tai-yü felt guilty in their consciences; and by the time they heard all she said, they were quite flushed from shame. Lady Feng did not, it is true, fathom the gist of what had been said, but at the sight of the expression betrayed on the faces of the three cousins, she readily got an inkling of it. "On this broiling hot day," she inquired laughing also; "who still eats raw ginger?"

None of the party could make out the import of her insinuation. "There's no one eating raw ginger," they said.

Lady Feng intentionally then brought her hands to her cheeks, and rubbing them, she remarked with an air of utter astonishment, "Since there's no one eating raw ginger, how is it that you are all so fiery in the face?"

Hearing this, Pao-yü and Tai-yü waxed more uncomfortable than ever. So much so, that Pao-ch'ai, who meant to continue the conversation, did not think it nice to say anything more when she saw how utterly abashed Pao-yü was and how changed his manner. Her only course was therefore to smile and hold her peace. And as the rest of the inmates had not the faintest notion of the drift of the remarks exchanged between the four of them, they consequently followed her lead and put on a smile.

In a short while, however, Pao-ch'ai and lady Feng took their leave.

"You've also tried your strength with them," Tai-yü said to Pao-yü laughingly. "But they're far worse than I. Is every one as simple in mind and dull of tongue as I am as to allow people to say whatever they like."

Pao-yü was inwardly giving way to that unhappiness, which had been occasioned by Pao-ch'ai's touchiness, so when he also saw Tai-yü approach him and taunt him, displeasure keener than ever was aroused in him. A desire then asserted itself to speak out his mind to her, but dreading lest Tai-yü should he in one of her sensitive moods, he, needless to say, stifled his anger and straightway left the apartment in a state of mental depression.

It happened to be the season of the greatest heat. Breakfast time too was already past, and masters as well as servants were, for the most part, under the influence of the lassitude felt on lengthy days. As Pao-yü therefore strolled, from place to place, his hands behind his back he heard not so much as the caw of a crow. Issuing out of his grandmother's compound on the near side, he wended his steps westwards, and crossed the passage, on which lady Feng's quarters gave. As soon as he reached the entrance of her court, he perceived the door ajar. But aware of lady Feng's habit of taking, during the hot weather, a couple of hours' siesta at noon, he did not feel it a convenient moment to intrude. Walking accordingly through the corner door, he stepped into Madame Wang's apartment. Here he discovered several waiting-maids, dosing with their needlework clasped in their hands. Madame Wang was asleep on the cool couch in the inner rooms. Chin Ch'uan-erh was sitting next to her massaging her legs. But she too was quite drowsy, and her eyes wore all awry. Pao-yü drew up to her with gentle tread. The moment, however, that he unfastened the pendants from the earrings she wore, Chin Ch'uan opened her eyes, and realised that it was no one than Pao-yü.

“Are you feeling so worn out!” he smilingly remarked in a low tone of voice.

Chin Ch’uan pursed up her lips and gave him a smile. Then waving her hand so as to bid him quit the room, she again closed her eyes.

Pao-yü, at the sight of her, felt considerable affection for her and unable to tear himself away, so quietly stretching his head forward, and noticing that Madame Wang’s eyes were shut, he extracted from a purse, suspended about his person, one of the ‘scented-snow-for-moistening-mouth pills,’ with which it was full, and placed it on Chin Ch’uan-erh’s lips. Chin Ch’uan-erh, however, did not open her eyes, but simply held (the pill) in her mouth. Pao-yü then approached her and took her hand in his. “I’ll ask you of your mistress,” he gently observed smiling, “and you and I will live together.”

To this Chin Ch’uan-erh said not a word.

“If that won’t do,” Pao-yü continued, “I’ll wait for your mistress to wake and appeal to her at once.”

Chin Ch’uan-erh distended her eyes wide, and pushed Pao-yü off. “What’s the hurry?” she laughed. “‘A gold hairpin may fall into the well; but if it’s yours it will remain yours only.’ Is it possible that you don’t even see the spirit of this proverb? But I’ll tell you a smart thing. Just you go into the small court, on the east side, and you’ll find for yourself what Mr. Chia Huau and Ts’ai Yun are up to!”

“Let them be up to whatever they like,” smiled Pao-yü, “I shall simply stick to your side!”

But he then saw Madame Wang twist herself round, get up, and give a slap to Chin Ch’uan-erh on her mouth. “You mean wench!” she exclaimed, abusing her, while she pointed her finger at her, “it’s you, and the like of you, who corrupt these fine young fellows with all the nice things you teach them!”

The moment Pao-yü perceived Madame Wang rise, he bolted like a streak of smoke. Chin Ch’uan-erh, meanwhile, felt half of her face as hot as fire, yet she did not dare utter one word of complaint. The various waiting-maids soon came to hear that Madame Wang had awoke and they rushed in in a body.

“Go and tell your mother,” Madame Wang thereupon said to Yü Ch’uan-erh, “to

fetch your elder sister away."

Chin Ch'uan-erh, at these words, speedily fell on her knees. With tears in her eyes: "I won't venture to do it again," she pleaded. "If you, Madame, wish to flog me, or to scold me do so at once, and as much as you like but don't send me away. You will thus accomplish an act of heavenly grace! I've been in attendance on your ladyship for about ten years, and if you now drive me away, will I be able to look at any one in the face?"

Though Madame Wang was a generous, tender-hearted person, and had at no time raised her hand to give a single blow to any servant-girl, she, however, when she accidentally discovered Chin Ch'uan-erh behave on this occasion in this barefaced manner, a manner which had all her lifetime been most reprehensible to her, was so overcome by passion that she gave Chin Ch'uan-erh just one slap and spoke to her a few sharp words. And albeit Chin Ch'uan-erh indulged in solicitous entreaties, she would not on any account keep her in her service. At length, Chin Ch'uan-erh's mother, Dame Pao, was sent for to take her away. Chin Ch'uan-erh therefore had to conceal her disgrace, suppress her resentment, and quit the mansion.

But without any further reference to her, we will now take up our story with Pao-yü. As soon as he saw Madame Wang awake, his spirits were crushed. All alone he hastily made his way into the Ta Kuan garden. Here his attention was attracted by the ruddy sun, shining in the zenith, the shade of the trees extending far and wide, the song of the cicadas, filling the ear; and by a perfect stillness, not even broken by the echo of a human voice. But the instant he got near the trellis, with the cinnamon roses, the sound of sobs fell on his ear. Doubts and surmises crept into Pao-yü‘s mind, so halting at once, he listened with intentness. Then actually he discerned some one on the off-side of the trellis. This was the fifth moon, the season when the flowers and foliage of the cinnamon roses were in full bloom. Furtively peeping through an aperture in the fence, Pao-yü saw a young girl squatting under the flowers and digging the ground with a hairpin she held in her hand. As she dug, she silently gave way to tears.

"Can it be possible," mused Pao-yü, "that this girl too is stupid? Can she also be following P'in Erh's example and come to inter flowers? Why if she's likewise really burying flowers," he afterwards went on to smilingly reflect, "this can aptly be termed: 'Tung Shih tries to imitate a frown.' But not only is what she

does not original, but it is despicable to boot. You needn't," he meant to shout out to the girl, at the conclusion of this train of thought, "try and copy Miss Lin's example." But before the words had issued from his mouth, he luckily scrutinised her a second time, and found that the girl's features were quite unfamiliar to him, that she was no menial, and that she looked like one of the twelve singing maids, who were getting up the plays. He could not, however, make out what *rôles* she filled: scholars, girls, old men, women, or buffoons. Pao-yü quickly put out his tongue and stopped his mouth with his hand. "How fortunate," he inwardly soliloquised, "that I didn't make any reckless remark! It was all because of my inconsiderate talk on the last two occasions, that P'in Erh got angry with me, and that Pao-ch'ai felt hurt. And had I now given them offence also, I would have been in a still more awkward fix!"

While wrapt in these thoughts, he felt much annoyance at not being able to recognise who she was. But on further minute inspection, he noticed that this maiden, with contracted eyebrows, as beautiful as the hills in spring, frowning eyes as clear as the streams in autumn, a face, with transparent skin, and a slim waist, was elegant and beautiful and almost the very image of Lin Tai-yü. Pao-yü could not, from the very first, make up his mind to wrench himself away. But as he stood gazing at her in a doltish mood, he realised that, although she was tracing on the ground with the gold hairpin, she was not digging a hole to bury flowers in, but was merely delineating characters on the surface of the soil. Pao-yü's eyes followed the hairpin from first to last, as it went up and as it came down. He watched each dash, each dot and each hook. He counted the strokes. They numbered eighteen. He himself then set to work and sketched with his finger on the palm of his hand, the lines, in their various directions, and in the order they had been traced a few minutes back, so as to endeavour to guess what the character was. On completing the sketch, he discovered, the moment he came to reflect, that it was the character "Ch'iang," in the combination, 'Ch'iang Wei,' representing cinnamon roses.

"She too," pondered Pao-yü, "must have been bent upon writing verses, or supplying some line or other, and at the sight now of the flowers, the idea must have suggested itself to her mind. Or it may very likely be that having spontaneously devised a couplet, she got suddenly elated and began, for fear it should slip from her memory, to trace it on the ground so as to tone the rhythm. Yet there's no saying. Let me see, however, what she's going to write next."

While cogitating, he looked once more. Lo, the girl was still tracing. But tracing

up or tracing down, it was ever the character “Ch’iang.” When he gazed again, it was still the self-same Ch’iang.

The one inside the fence fell, in fact, from an early stage, into a foolish mood, and no sooner was one ‘Ch’iang,’ finished than she started with another; so that she had already written several tens of them. The one outside gazed and gazed, until he unwittingly also got into the same foolish mood. Intent with his eyes upon following the movements of the pin, in his mind, he communed thus with his own thoughts: “This girl must, for a certainty, have something to say, or some unspeakable momentous secret that she goes on like this. But if outwardly she behaves in this wise, who knows what anguish she mayn’t suffer at heart? And yet, with a frame to all appearances so very delicate, how could she ever resist much inward anxiety! Woe is me that I’m unable to transfer some part of her burden on to my own shoulders!”

In midsummer, cloudy and bright weather are uncertain. A few specks of clouds suffice to bring about rain. Of a sudden, a cold blast swept by, and tossed about by the wind fell a shower of rain. Pao-yü perceived that the water trickling down the girl’s head saturated her gauze attire in no time. “It’s pouring,” Pao-yü debated within himself, “and how can a frame like hers resist the brunt of such a squall.” Unable therefore to restrain himself, he vehemently shouted: “Leave off writing! See, it’s pouring; you’re wet through!”

The girl caught these words, and was frightened out of her wits. Raising her head, she at once descried some one or other standing beyond the flowers and calling out to her: “Leave off writing. It’s pouring!” But as Pao-yü was, firstly, of handsome appearance, and as secondly the luxuriant abundance of flowers and foliage screened with their boughs, thick-laden with leaves, the upper and lower part of his person, just leaving half of his countenance exposed to view, the maiden simply jumped at the conclusion that he must be a servant girl, and never for a moment dreamt that it might be Pao-yü. “Many thanks, sister, for recalling me to my senses,” she consequently smiled. “Yet is there forsooth anything outside there to protect you from the rain?”

This single remark proved sufficient to recall Pao-yü to himself. With an exclamation of “Ai-yah,” he at length became conscious that his whole body was cold as ice. Then drooping his head, he realised that his own person too was drenched. “This will never do,” he cried, and with one breath he had to run back into the I Hung court. His mind, however, continued much exercised about the

girl as she had nothing to shelter her from the rain.

As the next day was the dragon-boat festival, Wen Kuan and the other singing girls, twelve in all, were given a holiday, so they came into the garden and amused themselves by roaming everywhere and anywhere. As luck would have it, the two girls Pao-Kuan, who filled the *rôle* of young men and Yü Kuan, who represented young women, were in the I Hung court enjoying themselves with Hsi Jen, when rain set in and they were prevented from going back, so in a body they stopped up the drain to allow the water to accumulate in the yard. Then catching those that could be caught, and driving those that had to be driven, they laid hold of a few of the green-headed ducks, variegated marsh-birds and coloured mandarin-ducks, and tying their wings they let them loose in the court to disport themselves. Closing the court Hsi Jen and her playmates stood together under the verandah and enjoyed the fun. Pao-yü therefore found the entrance shut. He gave a rap at the door. But as every one inside was bent upon laughing, they naturally did not catch the sound; and it was only after he had called and called, and made a noise by thumping at the door, that they at last heard. Imagining, however, that Pao-yü could not be coming back at that hour, Hsi Jen shouted laughing: “who’s it now knocking at the door? There’s no one to go and open.”

“It’s I,” rejoined Pao-yü.

“It’s Miss Pao-ch’ai’s tone of voice,” added She Yüeh.

“Nonsense!” cried Ch’ing Wen. “What would Miss Pao-ch’ai come over to do at such an hour?”

“Let me go,” chimed in Hsi Jen, “and see through the fissure in the door, and if we can open, we’ll open; for we mustn’t let her go back, wet through.”

With these words, she came along the passage to the doorway. On looking out, she espied Pao-yü dripping like a chicken drenched with rain.

Seeing him in this plight, Hsi Jen felt solicitous as well as amused. With alacrity, she flung the door wide open, laughing so heartily that she was doubled in two. “How could I ever have known,” she said, clapping her hands, “that you had returned, Sir! Yet how is it that you’ve run back in this heavy rain?”

Pao-yü had, however, been feeling in no happy frame of mind. He had fully

resolved within himself to administer a few kicks to the person, who came to open the door, so as soon as it was unbarred, he did not try to make sure who it was, but under the presumption that it was one of the servant-girls, he raised his leg and give her a kick on the side.

“Ai-yah!” ejaculated Hsi Jen.

Pao-yü nevertheless went on to abuse. “You mean things!” he shouted. “It’s because I’ve always treated you so considerately that you don’t respect me in the least! And you now go to the length of making a laughing-stock of me!”

As he spoke, he lowered his head. Then catching sight of Hsi Jen, in tears, he realised that he had kicked the wrong person. “Hallo!” he said, promptly smiling, “is it you who’ve come? Where did I kick you?”

Hsi Jen had never, previous to this, received even a harsh word from him. When therefore she on this occasion unexpectedly saw Pao-yü gave her a kick in a fit of anger and, what made it worse, in the presence of so many people, shame, resentment, and bodily pain overpowered her and she did not, in fact, for a time know where to go and hide herself. She was then about to give rein to her displeasure, but the reflection that Pao-yü could not have kicked her intentionally obliged her to suppress her indignation. “Instead of kicking,” she remarked, “don’t you yet go and change your clothes?”

Pao-yü walked into the room. As he did so, he smiled. “Up to the age I’ve reached,” he observed, “this is the first instance on which I’ve ever so thoroughly lost control over my temper as to strike any one; and, contrary to all my thoughts, it’s you that happened to come in my way?”

Hsi Jen, while patiently enduring the pain, effected the necessary change in his attire. “I’ve been here from the very first,” she simultaneously added, smilingly, “so in all things, whether large or small, good or bad, it has naturally fallen to my share to bear the brunt. But not to say another word about your assault on me, why, tomorrow you’ll indulge your hand and star-beating others!”

“I did not strike you intentionally just now,” retorted Pao-yü.

“Who ever said,” rejoined Hsi Jen, “that you did it intentionally! It has ever been the duty of that tribe of servant-girls to open and shut the doors, yet they’ve got into the way of being obstinate, and have long ago become such an abomination

that people's teeth itch to revenge themselves on them. They don't know, besides, what fear means. So had you first assured yourself that it was they and given them a kick, a little intimidating would have done them good. But I'm at the bottom of the mischief that happened just now, for not calling those, upon whom it devolves, to come and open for you."

During the course of their conversation, the rain ceased, and Pao Kuan and Yü Kuan had been able to take their leave. Hsi Jen, however, experienced such intense pain in her side, and felt such inward vexation, that at supper she could not put a morsel of anything in her mouth. When in the evening, the time came for her to have her bath, she discovered, on divesting herself of her clothes, a bluish bruise on her side of the size of a saucer and she was very much frightened. But as she could not very well say anything about it to any one, she presently retired to rest. But twitches of pain made her involuntarily moan in her dreams and groan in her sleep.

Pao-yü did, it is true, not hurt her with any malice, but when he saw Hsi Jen so listless and restless, and suddenly heard her groan in the course of the night, he realised how severely he must have kicked her. So getting out of bed, he gently seized the lantern and came over to look at her. But as soon as he reached the side of her bed, he perceived Hsi Jen expectorate, with a retch, a whole mouthful of phlegm. "Oh me!" she gasped, as she opened her eyes. The presence of Pao-yü startled her out of her wits. "What are you up to?" she asked.

"You groaned in your dreams," answered Pao-yü, "so I must have kicked you hard. Do let me see!"

"My head feels giddy," said Hsi Jen. "My throat foul and sweet; throw the light on the floor!"

At these words, Pao-yü actually raised the lantern. The moment he cast the light below, he discerned a quantity of fresh blood on the floor.

Pao-yü was seized with consternation. "Dreadful!" was all he could say. At the sight of the blood, Hsi Jen's heart too partly waxed cold.

But, reader, the next chapter will reveal the sequel, if you really have any wish to know more about them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Pao-yü allows the girl Ch’ing Wen to tear his fan so as to afford her amusement. A wedding proves to be the result of the descent of a unicorn.

But to proceed. When she saw on the floor the blood, she had brought up, Hsi Jen immediately grew partly cold. What she had often heard people mention in past days ‘that the lives of young people, who expectorate blood, are uncertain, and that although they may live long, they are, after all, mere wrecks,’ flashed through her mind. The remembrance of this saying at once completely scattered to the winds the wish, she had all along cherished, of striving for honour and of being able to boast of glory; and from her eyes unwittingly ran down streams of tears.

When Pao-yü saw her crying, his heart was seized with anguish. “What’s it that preys on your mind?” he consequently asked her.

Hsi Jen strained every nerve to smile. “There’s no rhyme or reason for anything,” she replied, “so what can it be?”

Pao-yü‘s intention was to there and then give orders to the servant to warm some white wine and to ask them for a few ‘Li-T’ung’ pills compounded with goat’s blood, but Hsi Jen clasped his hand tight. “My troubling you is of no matter,” she smiled, “but were I to put ever so many people to inconvenience, they’ll bear me a grudge for my impudence. Not a soul, it’s clear enough, knows anything about it now, but were you to make such a bustle as to bring it to people’s notice, you’ll be in an awkward fix, and so will I. The proper thing, therefore, is for you to send a page tomorrow to request Dr. Wang to prepare some medicine for me. When I take this I shall be all right. And as neither any human being nor spirit will thus get wind of it, won’t it be better?”

Pao-yü found her suggestion so full of reason that he thought himself obliged to abandon his purpose; so approaching the table, he poured a cup of tea, and came over and gave it to Hsi Jen to rinse her mouth with. Aware, however, as Hsi Jen was that Pao-yü himself was not feeling at ease in his mind, she was on the point of bidding him not wait upon her; but convinced that he would once more be certain not to accede to her wishes, and that the others would, in the second place, have to be disturbed, she deemed it expedient to humour him. Leaning on

the couch, she consequently allowed Pao-yü to come and attend to her.

As soon as the fifth watch struck, Pao-yü, unmindful of combing or washing, hastily put on his clothes and left the room; and sending for Wang Chi-jen, he personally questioned him with all minuteness about her ailment.

Wang Chi-jen asked how it had come about. “It’s simply a bruise; nothing more,” (he said), and forthwith he gave him the names of some pills and medicines, and told him how they were to be taken, and how they were to be applied.

Pao-yü committed every detail to memory, and on his return into the garden, the treatment was, needless for us to explain, taken in hand in strict compliance with the directions.

This was the day of the dragon-boat festival. Cat-tail and artemisia were put over the doors. Tiger charms were suspended on every back. At noon, Madame Wang got a banquet ready, and to this midday feast, she invited the mother, daughter and the rest of the members of the Hsüeh household.

Pao-yü noticed that Pao-ch’ai was in such low spirits that she would not even speak to him, and concluded that the reason was to be sought in the incident of the previous day. Madame Wang seeing Pao-yü in a sullen humour jumped at the surmise that it must be due to Chin Ch’uan’s affair of the day before; and so ill at ease did she feel that she heeded him less than ever. Lin Tai-yü, detected Pao-yü‘s apathy, and presumed that he was out of sorts for having given umbrage to Pao-ch’ai, and her manner likewise assumed a listless air. Lady Feng had, in the course of the previous evening, been told by Madame Wang what had taken place between Pao-yü and Chin Ch’uan, and when she came to know that Madame Wang was in an unhappy frame of mind she herself did not venture to chat or laugh, but at once regulated her behaviour to suit Madame Wang’s mood. So the lack of animation became more than ever perceptible; for the good cheer of Ying Ch’un and her sisters was also damped by the sight of all of them down in the mouth. The natural consequence therefore was that they all left after a very short stay.

Lin Tai-yü had a natural predilection for retirement. She did not care for social gatherings. Her notions, however, were not entirely devoid of reason. She maintained that people who gathered together must soon part; that when they

came together, they were full of rejoicing, but did they not feel lonely when they broke up? That since this sense of loneliness gave rise to chagrin, it was consequently preferable not to have any gatherings. That flowers afforded an apt example. When they opened, they won people's admiration; but when they faded, they added to the feeling of vexation; so that better were it if they did not blossom at all! To this cause therefore must be assigned the fact that when other people were glad, she, on the contrary, felt unhappy.

Pao-yü's disposition was such that he simply yearned for frequent gatherings, and looked forward with sorrow to the breaking up which must too soon come round. As for flowers, he wished them to bloom repeatedly and was haunted with the dread of their dying in a little time. Yet albeit manifold anguish fell to his share when banquets drew to a close and flowers began to fade, he had no alternative but to practice resignation.

On this account was it that, when the company cheerlessly broke up from the present feast, Lin Tai-yü did not mind the separation; and that Pao-yü experienced such melancholy and depression, that, on his return to his apartments, he gave way to deep groans and frequent sighs.

Ch'ing Wen, as it happened, came to the upper quarters to change her costume. In an unguarded moment, she let her fan slip out of her hand and drop on the ground. As it fell, the bones were snapped. "You stupid thing!" Pao-yü exclaimed, sighing, "what a dunce! what next will you be up to by and bye? When, in a little time, you get married and have a home of your own, will you, forsooth, still go on in this happy-go-lucky careless sort of way?"

"Master Secundus," replied Ch'ing Wen with a sardonic smile, "your temper is of late dreadfully fiery, and time and again it leaks out on your very face! The other day you even beat Hsi Jen and here you are again now finding fault with us! If you feel disposed to kick or strike us, you are at liberty, Sir, to do so at your pleasure; but for a fan to slip on the ground is an everyday occurrence! How many of those crystal jars and cornelian bowls were smashed the other time, I don't remember, and yet you were not seen to fly into a tantrum; and now, for a fan do you distress yourself so? What's the use of it? If you dislike us, well pack us off and select some good girls to serve you, and we will quietly go away. Won't this be better?"

This rejoinder so exasperated Pao-yü that his whole frame trembled violently.

“You needn’t be in a hurry!” he then shouted. “There will be a day of parting by and bye.”

Hsi Jen was on the other side, and from an early period she listened to the conversation between them. Hurriedly crossing over, “what are you up to again?” she said to Pao-yü, “why, there’s nothing to put your monkey up! I’m perfectly right in my assertion that when I’m away for any length of time, something is sure to happen.”

Ch’ing Wen heard these remarks. “Sister,” she interposed smiling ironically, “since you’ve got the gift of the gab, you should have come at once; you would then have spared your master his fit of anger. It’s you who have from bygone days up to the present waited upon master; we’ve never had anything to do with attending on him; and it’s because you’ve served him so faithfully that he repaid you yesterday with a kick on the stomach. But who knows what punishment mayn’t be in store for us, who aren’t fit to wait upon him decently!”

At these insinuations, Hsi Jen felt both incensed and ashamed. She was about to make some response but Pao-yü had worked himself into such another passion as to get quite yellow in the face, and she was obliged to rein in her temper. Pushing Ch’ing Wen, “Dear sister,” she cried, “you had better be off for a stroll! it’s really we, who are to blame!”

The very mention of the word “we” made it certain to Ch’ing Wen that she implied herself and Pao-yü, and thus unawares more fuel was added again to her jealous notions. Giving way to several loud smiles, full of irony: “I can’t make out,” she insinuated, “who you may mean. But don’t make me blush on your account! Even those devilish pranks of yours can’t hoodwink me! How and why is it that you’ve started styling yourself as ‘we?’ Properly speaking, you haven’t as yet so much as attained the designation of ‘Miss!’ You’re simply no better than I am, and how is it then that you presume so high as to call yourself ‘we.’”

Hsi Jen’s face grew purple from shame. “The fact is,” she reflected, “that I’ve said more than I should.”

“As one and all of you are ever bearing her malice,” Pao-yü simultaneously observed, “I’ll actually raise her tomorrow to a higher status!”

Hsi Jen quickly snatched Pao-yü‘s hand. “She’s a stupid girl,” she said, “what’s the use of arguing with her? What’s more, you’ve so far borne with them and

overlooked ever, so many other things more grievous than this; and what are you up to to-day?"

"If I'm really a stupid girl," repeated Ch'ing Wen, smiling sarcastically, "am I a fit person for you to hold converse with? Why, I'm purely and simply a slave-girl; that's all."

"Are you, after all," cried Hsi Jen, at these words, "bickering with me, or with Master Secundus? If you bear me a grudge, you'd better then address your remarks to me alone; albeit it isn't right that you should kick up such a hullaballoo in the presence of Mr. Secundus. But if you have a spite against Mr. Secundus, you shouldn't be shouting so boisterously as to make thousands of people know all about it! I came in, a few minutes back, merely for the purpose of setting matters right, and of urging you to make up your quarrels so that we should all be on the safe side; and here I have the unlucky fate of being set upon by you, Miss! Yet you neither seem to be angry with me, nor with Mr. Secundus! But armed *cap-à-pie* as you appear to be, what is your ultimate design? I won't utter another word, but let you have your say!"

While she spoke, she was hurriedly wending her way out.

"You needn't raise your dander." Pao-yü remarked to Ch'ing Wen. "I've guessed the secret of your heart, so I'll go and tell mother that as you've also attained a certain age, she should send you away. Will this please you, yes or no?"

This allusion made Ch'ing Wen unwittingly feel again wounded at heart. She tried to conceal her tears. "Why should I go away?" she asked. "If even you be so prejudiced against me as to try and devise means to pack me off, you won't succeed."

"I never saw such brawling!" Pao-yü exclaimed. "You're certainly bent upon going! I might as well therefore let mother know so as to bundle you off!"

While addressing her, he rose to his feet and was intent upon trudging off at once. Hsi Jen lost no time in turning round and impeding his progress. "Where are you off to?" she cried.

"I'm going to tell mother," answered Pao-yü.

"It's no use whatever!" Hsi Jen smiled, "you may be in real earnest to go and tell

her, but aren’t you afraid of putting her to shame? If even she positively means to leave, you can very well wait until you two have got over this bad blood. And when everything is past and gone, it won’t be any too late for you to explain, in the course of conversation, the whole case to our lady, your mother. But if you now go in hot haste and tell her, as if the matter were an urgent one, won’t you be the means of making our mistress give way to suspicion?”

“My mother,” demurred Pao-yü, “is sure not to entertain any suspicions, as all I will explain to her is that she insists upon leaving.”

“When did I ever insist upon going?” sobbed Ch’ing Wen. “You fly into a rage, and then you have recourse to threats to intimidate me. But you’re at liberty to go and say anything you like; for as I’ll knock my brains out against the wall, I won’t get alive out of this door.”

“This is, indeed, strange!” exclaimed Pao-yü. “If you won’t go, what’s the good of all this fuss? I can’t stand this bawling, so it will be a riddance if you would get out of the way!”

Saying this, he was resolved upon going to report the matter. Hsi Jen found herself powerless to dissuade him. She had in consequence no other resource but to fall on her knees.

Pi Hen, Ch’iu Wen, She Yüeh and the rest of the waiting-maids had realised what a serious aspect the dispute had assumed, and not a sound was to be heard to fall from their lips. They remained standing outside listening to what was going on. When they now overheard Hsi Jen making solicitous entreaties on her knees, they rushed into the apartment in a body; and with one consent they prostrated themselves on the floor.

Pao-yü at once pulled Hsi Jen up. Then with a sigh, he took a seat on the bed. “Get up,” he shouted to the body of girls, “and clear out! What would you have me do?” he asked, addressing himself to Hsi Jen. “This heart of mine has been rent to pieces, and no one has any idea about it!”

While speaking, tears of a sudden rolled down his cheek. At the sight of Pao-yü weeping, Hsi Jen also melted into a fit of crying. Ch’ing Wen was standing by them, with watery eyes. She was on the point of reasoning with them, when espying Lin Tai-yü step into the room, she speedily walked out.

“On a grand holiday like this,” remonstrated Lin Tai-yü smiling, “how is it that you’re snivelling away, and all for nothing? Is it likely that high words have resulted all through that ‘dumpling’ contest?”

Pao-yü and Lin Tai-yü blurted out laughing.

“You don’t tell me, cousin Secundus,” Lin Tai-yü put in, “but I know all about it, even though I have asked no questions.”

Now she spoke, and now she patted Hsi Jen on the shoulder. “My dear sister-in-law,” she smiled, “just you tell me! It must surely be that you two have had a quarrel. Confide in me, your cousin, so that I might reconcile you.”

“Miss Lin,” rejoined Hsi Jen, pushing her off, “what are you fussing about? I am simply one of our servant-girls; you’re therefore rather erratic in your talk!”

“You say that you’re only a servant-girl,” smilingly replied Tai-yü, “and yet I treat you like a sister-in-law.”

“Why do you,” Pao-yü chimed in, “give her this abusive epithet? But however much she may make allowance for this, can she, when there are so many others who tell idle tales on her account, put up with your coming and telling her all you’ve said?”

“Miss Lin,” smiled Hsi Jen, “you’re not aware of the purpose of my heart. Unless my breath fails and I die, I shall continue in his service.”

“If you die,” remarked Lin Tai-yü smiling, “what will others do, I wonder? As for me, I shall be the first to die from crying.”

“Were you to die,” added Pao-yü laughingly, “I shall become a bonze.”

“You’d better be a little more sober-minded!” laughed Hsi Jen. “What’s the good of coming out with all these things?”

Lin Tai-yü put out two of her fingers, and puckered up her lips. “Up to this,” she laughed, “he’s become a bonze twice. Henceforward, I’ll try and remember how many times you make up your mind to become a Buddhist priest!”

This reminded Pao-yü that she was referring to a remark he had made on a

previous occasion, but smiling to himself, he allowed the matter to drop.

After a short interval, Lin Tai-yü went away. A servant then came to announce that Mr. Hsüeh wanted to see him, and Pao-yü had to go. The purpose of this visit was in fact to invite him to a banquet, and as he could not very well put forward any excuse to refuse, he had to remain till the end of the feast before he was able to take his leave. The result was that, on his return, in the evening, he was to a great extent under the effect of wine. With bustling step, he wended his way into his own court. Here he perceived that the cool couch with a back to it, had already been placed in the yard, and that there was some one asleep on it. Prompted by the conviction that it must be Hsi Jen, Pao-yü seated himself on the edge of the couch. As he did so, he gave her a push, and inquired whether her sore place was any better. But thereupon he saw the occupant turn herself round, and exclaim: “What do you come again to irritate me for?”

Pao-yü, at a glance, realised that it was not Hsi Jen, but Ch’ing Wen. Pao-yü then clutched her and compelled her to sit next to him. “Your disposition,” he smiled, “has been more and more spoilt through indulgence. When you let the fan drop this morning, I simply made one or two remarks, and out you came with that long rigmarole. Had you gone for me it wouldn’t have mattered; but you also dragged in Hsi Jen, who only interfered with every good intention of inducing us to make it up again. But, ponder now, ought you to have done it; yes or no?”

“With this intense heat,” remonstrated Ch’ing Wen, “why do you pull me and toss me about? Should any people see you, what will they think? But this person of mine isn’t meet to be seated in here.”

“Since you yourself know that it isn’t meet,” replied Pao-yü with a smile, “why then were you sleeping here?”

To this taunt Ch’ing Wen had nothing to say. But she spurted out into fresh laughter. “It was all right,” she retorted, “during your absence; but the moment you come, it isn’t meet for me to stay! Get up and let me go and have my bath. Hsi Jen and She Yüeh have both had theirs, so I’ll call them here!”

“I’ve just had again a good deal of wine,” remarked Pao-yü, laughingly; “so a wash will be good for me. And since you’ve not had your bath, you had better bring the water and let’s both have it together.”

“No, no!” smiled Ch’ing Wen, waving her hand, “I cannot presume to put you to

any trouble, Sir. I still remember how when Pi Hen used to look after your bath you occupied fully two or three hours. What you were up to during that time we never knew. We could not very well walk in. When you had however done washing, and we entered your room, we found the floor so covered with water that the legs of the bed were soaking and the matting itself a regular pool. Nor could we make out what kind of washing you'd been having; and for days afterwards we had a laugh over it. But I've neither any time to get the water ready; nor do I see the need for you to have a wash along with me. Besides, to-day it's chilly, and as you've had a bath only a little while back, you can very well just now dispense with one. But I'll draw a basin of water for you to wash your face, and to shampoo your head with. Not long ago, Yüan Yang sent you a few fruits; they were put in that crystal bowl, so you'd better tell them to bring them to you to taste."

"Well, in that case." laughed Pao-yü, "you needn't also have a bath. Just simply wash your hands, and bring the fruit and let's have some together."

"I'm so shaky," smiled Ch'ing Wen "that even fans slip out of my hands, and how could I fetch the fruit for you. Were I also to break the dish, it will be still more dreadful!"

"If you want to break it, break it!" smiled Pao-yü. "These things are only intended for general use. You like this thing; I fancy that; our respective tastes are not identical. The original use of that fan, for instance, was to fan one's self with; but if you chose to break it for fun, you were quite at liberty to do so. The only thing is, when you get angry don't make it the means of giving vent to your temper! Just like those salvers. They are really meant for serving things in. But if you fancy that kind of sound, then deliberately smash them, that will be all right. But don't, when you are in high dudgeon avail yourself of them to air your resentment! That's what one would call having a fancy for a thing!"

Ch'ing Wen greeted his words with a smile.

"Since that be so," she said, "bring me your fan and let me tear it. What most takes my fancy is tearing!"

Upon hearing this Pao-yü smilingly handed it to her. Ch'ing Wen, in point of fact, took it over, and with a crash she rent it in two. Close upon this, the sound of crash upon crash became audible.

Pao-yü was standing next to her. “How nice the noise is!” he laughed. “Tear it again and make it sound a little more!”

But while he spoke, She Yüeh was seen to walk in. “Don’t,” she smiled, “be up to so much mischief!” Pao-yü, however, went up to her and snatching her fan also from her hand, he gave it to Ch’ing Wen. Ch’ing Wen took it and there and then likewise broke it in two. Both he and she then had a hearty laugh.

“What do you call this?” She Yüeh expostulated. “Do you take my property and make it the means of distracting yourselves!”

“Open the fan-box,” shouted Pao-yü, “and choose one and take it away! What, are they such fine things!”

“In that case,” ventured She Yüeh, “fetch the fans and let her break as many as she can. Won’t that be nice!”

“Go and bring them at once!” Pao-yü laughed.

“I won’t be up to any such tomfoolery!” She Yüeh demurred. “She hasn’t snapped her hands, so bid her go herself and fetch them!”

“I’m feeling tired,” interposed Ch’ing Wen, as she laughingly leant on the bed. “I’ll therefore tear some more tomorrow again.”

“An old writer says,” added Pao-yü with a smile, “‘that a thousand ounces of gold cannot purchase a single laugh’! What can a few fans cost?”

After moralising, he went on to call Hsi Jen. Hsi Jen had just finished the necessary change in her dress so she stepped in; and a young servant-girl, Chiao Hui, crossed over and picked up the broken fans. Then they all sat and enjoyed the cool breeze. But we can well dispense with launching into any minute details.

On the morrow, noon found Madame Wang, Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai, Lin Tai-yü, and the rest of the young ladies congregated in dowager lady Chia’s suite of rooms. Some one then brought the news that: “Miss Shih had arrived.” In a little time they perceived Shih Hsiang-yun make her appearance in the court, at the head of a bevy of waiting-maids and married women. Pao-ch’ai, Tai-yu and her other cousins, quickly ran down the steps to meet her and exchange greetings. But

with what fervour girls of tender years re-unite some day after a separation of months need not, of course, be explained. Presently, she entered the apartments, paid her respects and inquired how they all were. But after this conventional interchange of salutations, old lady Chia pressed her to take off her outer garments as the weather was so close. Shih Hsiang-yün lost no time in rising to her feet and loosening her clothes. “I don’t see why,” Madame Wang thereupon smiled, “you wear all these things!’

“It’s entirely at aunt Secunda’s bidding,” retorted Shih Hsiang-yün, “that I put them on. Why, would any one of her own accord wear so many things!”

“Aunt,” interposed Pao-ch’ai, who stood by, with a smile, “you’re not aware that what most delights her in the matter of dress is to don other people’s clothes! Yes, I remember how, during her stay here in the third and fourth moons of last year, she used to wear cousin Pao’s pelisses. She even put on his shoes, and attached his frontlets as well round her head. At a casual glance, she looked the very image of cousin Pao; what was superfluous was that pair of earrings of hers. As she stood at the back of that chair she so thoroughly took in our venerable ancestor that she kept on shouting: ‘Pao-yü, come over! Mind the tassels suspended on that lamp; for if you shake the dust off, it may get into your eyes!’ But all she did was to laugh; she did not budge; and it was only after every one found it hard to keep their countenance that our worthy senior also started laughing. ‘You do look well in male habiliments!’ she said to her.”

“What about that!” cried Lin Tai-yü, “why, she had scarcely been here with us a couple of days in the first moon of last year, when we sent and fetched her, that we had a fall of snow. You, venerable senior, and her maternal aunt had on that day, I remember so well, just returned from worshipping the images of our ancestors, and a brand-new deep red felt wrapper of yours, dear grandmother, had been lying over there, when suddenly it disappeared. But, lo, she it was who had put it on! Being, however, too large and too long for her, she took a couple of handkerchiefs, and fastened them round her waist. She was then trudging into the back court with the servant-girls to make snow men when she tripped and fell flat in front of the drain, and got covered all over with mud.”

As she narrated this incident, every one recalled the circumstances to mind, and had a good laugh.

“Dame Chou,” Pao-ch’ai smilingly inquired of nurse Chou, “is your young lady

always as fond of pranks as ever or not?”

Nurse Chou then also gave a laugh.

“Pranks are nothing,” Ying Ch’un smiled. “What I do detest is her fondness for tittle-tattle! I’ve never seen any one who, even when asleep, goes on chatter-chatter; now laughing, and now talking, as she does. Nor can I make out where she gets all those idle yarns of hers.”

“I think she’s better of late,” interposed Madame Wang. “The other day some party or other came and they met; so she’s to have a mother-in-law very soon; and can she still be comporting herself like that!”

“Are you going to stay to-day,” dowager lady Chia then asked, “or going back home?”

Nurse Chou smiled. “Your venerable ladyship has not seen what an amount of clothes we’ve brought,” she replied. “We mean, of course, to stay a couple of days.”

“Is cousin Pao-yü not at home?” inquired Hsiang-yün.”

“There she’s again! She doesn’t think of others,” remarked Pao-ch’ai smiling significantly. “She only thinks of her cousin Pao-yü. They’re both so fond of larks! This proves that she hasn’t yet got rid of that spirit of mischief.”

“You’re all now grown up,” observed old lady Chia; “and you shouldn’t allude to infant names.”

But while she was chiding them, they noticed Pao-yü arrive.

“Cousin Yün, have you come?” he smiled. “How is it that you wouldn’t come the other day when some one was despatched to fetch you?”

“It’s only a few minutes,” Madame Wang said, “since our venerable senior called that one to task, and now here he comes and refers to names and surnames!”

“Your cousin Pao,” ventured Lin Tai-yü, “has something good, which he has been waiting to give you.”

“What good thing is it?” asked Hsiang-yün.

“Do you believe what she says?” observed Pao-yü laughingly. “But how many days is it that I have not seen you, and you’ve grown so much taller!”

“Is cousin Hsi Jen all right?” inquired Hsiang-yün.

“She’s all right,” answered Pao-yü. “Many thanks for your kind thought of her.”

“I’ve brought something nice for her,” resumed Hsiang-yün.

Saying this, she produced her handkerchief, tied into a knot.

“What’s this something nice?” asked Pao-yü. “Wouldn’t it have been better if you’d brought her a couple of those rings with streaked stones of the kind you sent the other day?”

“Why, what’s this?” exclaimed Hsiang-yün laughing, opening, as she spoke, the handkerchief.

On close scrutiny, they actually found four streaked rings, similar to those she had previously sent, tied up in the same packet.

“Look here!” Lin Tai-yü smiled, “what a girl she is! Had you, when sending that fellow the other day to bring ours, given him these also to bring along with him, wouldn’t it have saved trouble? Instead of that, here you fussily bring them yourself to-day! I presumed that it was something out of the way again; but is it really only these things? In very truth, you’re a mere dunce!”

“It’s you who behave like a dunce now!” Shih Hsiang-yün smiled.

“I’ll speak out here and let every one judge for themselves who is the dunce. The servant, deputed to bring the things to you, had no need to open his mouth and say anything; for, as soon as they were brought in, it was of course evident, at a glance, that they were to be presented to you young ladies. But had he been the bearer of these things for them, I would have been under the necessity of explaining to him which was intended for this servant-girl, and which for that. Had the messenger had his wits about him, well and good; but had he been at all stupid he wouldn’t have been able to remember so much as the names of the girls! He would have made an awful mess of it, and talked a lot of nonsense. So

instead of being of any use he would have even muddled, hickledy-pickledy, your things. Had a female servant been despatched, it would have been all right. But as it happened, a servant-boy was again sent the other day, so how could he have mentioned the names of the waiting-girls? And by my bringing them in person to give them to them, doesn't it make things clearer?"

As she said this, she put down the four rings. "One is for sister Hsi Jen," she continued, "one is for sister Yüan Yang. One for sister Chin Ch'uan-erh, and one for sister P'ing Erh. They are only for these four girls; but would the servant-boys too forsooth have remembered them so clearly!"

At these words, the whole company smiled. "How really clear!" they cried.

"This is what it is to be able to speak!" Pao-yü put in. "She doesn't spare any one!"

Hearing this, Lin Tai-yü gave a sardonic smile. "If she didn't know how to use her tongue," she observed, "would she deserve to wear that unicorn of gold!"

While speaking, she rose and walked off.

Luckily, every one did not hear what she said. Only Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai pursed up her lips and laughed. Pao-yü, however, had overheard her remark, and he blamed himself for having once more talked in a heedless manner. Unawares his eye espied Pao-ch'ai much amused, and he too could not suppress a smile. But at the sight of Pao-yü in laughter, Pao-ch'ai hastily rose to her feet and withdrew. She went in search of Tai-yü, to have a chat and laugh with her.

"After you've had tea," old lady Chia thereupon said to Hsiang-yün, "you'd better rest a while and then go and see your sisters-in-law. Besides, it's cool in the garden, so you can walk about with your cousins."

Hsiang-yün expressed her assent, and, collecting the three rings, she wrapped them up, and went and lay down to rest. Presently, she got up with the idea of paying visits to lady Feng and her other relatives. Followed by a whole bevy of nurses and waiting-maids, she repaired into lady Feng's quarters on the off side. She bandied words with her for a while and then coming out she betook herself into the garden of Broad Vista, and called on Li Kung-ts'ai. But after a short visit, she turned her steps towards the I Hung court to look up Hsi Jen. "You people needn't," she said, turning her head round, "come along with me! You

may go and see your friends and relatives. It will be quite enough if you simply leave Ts'ui Lü to wait upon me."

Hearing her wishes, each went her own way in quest of aunts, or sisters-in-law. There only remained but Hsiang-yün and Ts'ui Lü.

"How is it," inquired Ts'ui Lü, "that these lotus flowers have not yet opened?"

"The proper season hasn't yet arrived," rejoined Shih Hsiang-yün.

"They too," continued Ts'ui Lü, "resemble those in our pond; they are double flowers."

"These here," remarked Hsiang-yün, "are not however up to ours."

"They have over there," observed Ts'ui Lü, "a pomegranate tree, with four or five branches joined one to another, just like one storey raised above another storey. What trouble it must have cost them to rear!"

"Flowers and plants," suggested Shih Hsiang-yün, "are precisely like the human race. With sufficient vitality, they grow up in a healthy condition."

"I can't credit these words," replied Ts'ui Lü, twisting her face round. "If you maintain that they are like human beings, how is it that I haven't seen any person, with one head growing over another."

This rejoinder evoked a smile from Hsiang-yün. "I tell you not to talk," she cried, "but you will insist upon talking! How do you expect people to be able to answer every thing you say! All things, whether in heaven or on earth come into existence by the cooperation of the dual powers, the male and female. So all things, whether good or bad, novel or strange, and all those manifold changes and transformations arise entirely from the favourable or adverse influence exercised by the male and female powers. And though some things seldom seen by mankind might come to life, the principle at work is, after all, the same."

"In the face of these arguments," laughed Ts'ui Lü, "everything, from old till now, from the very creation itself, embodies a certain proportion of the Yin and Yang principles."

"You stupid thing!" exclaimed Hsiang-yün smiling, "the more you talk, the more

stuff and nonsense falls from your lips! What about everything embodying a certain proportion of the principles Yin and Yang! Besides, the two words Yin and Yang are really one word; for when the Yang principle is exhausted, it becomes the Yin; and when the Yin is exhausted, it becomes Yang. And it isn't that, at the exhaustion of the Yin, another Yang comes into existence; and that, at the exhaustion of the Yang, a second Yin arises."

"This trash is sufficient to kill me!" ejaculated Ts'ui Lü. "What are the Yin and Yang? Why, they are without substance or form! But pray, Miss, tell me what sort of things these Yin and Yang can be!"

"The Yin and Yang," explained Hsiang-yün, "are no more than spirits, but anything affected by their influence at once assumes form. The heavens, for instance, are Yang, and the earth is Yin; water is Yin and fire is Yang; the sun is Yang and the moon Yin."

"Quite so! quite so!" cried out Ts'ui Lü, much amused by these explanations, "I've at length attained perception! It isn't strange then that people invariably call the sun 'T'ai-yang.' While astrologers keep on speaking of the moon as 'T'ai-yin-hsing,' or something like it. It must be on account of this principle."

"O-mi-to-fu!" laughed Hsiang-yün, "you have at last understood!"

"All these things possess the Yin and Yang; that's all right." T'sui Lü put in. "But is there any likelihood that all those mosquitoes, flees and worms, flowers, herbs, bricks and tiles have, in like manner, anything to do with the Yin and Yang?"

"How don't they!" exclaimed Hsiang-yün. "For example, even the leaves of that tree are distinguished by Yin and Yang. The side, which looks up and faces the sun, is called Yang; while that in the shade and looking downwards, is called Yin."

"Is it really so!" ejaculated T'sui Lü, upon hearing this; while she smiled and nodded her head. "Now I know all about it! But which is Yang and which Yin in these fans we're holding."

"This side, the front, is Yang," answered Hsiang-yün; "and that, the reverse, is Yin."

Ts’ui Lü went on to nod her head, and to laugh. She felt inclined to apply her questions to several other things, but as she could not fix her mind upon anything in particular, she, all of a sudden, drooped her head. Catching sight of the pendant in gold, representing a unicorn, which Hsiang-yün had about her person, she forthwith made allusion to it. “This, Miss,” she said smiling, “cannot likely also have any Yin and Yang!”

“The beasts of the field and the birds of the air,” proceeded Hsiang-yün, “are, the cock birds, Yang, and the hen birds, Yin. The females of beasts are Yin; and the males, Yang; so how is there none?”

“Is this male, or is this female?” inquired Ts’ui Lü.

“Ts’ui!” exclaimed Hsiang-yün, “what about male and female! Here you are with your nonsense again.”

“Well, never mind about that,” added Ts’ui Lü, “But how is it that all things have Yin and Yang, and that we human beings have no Yin and no Yang?”

Hsiang-yün then lowered her face. “You low-bred thing!” she exclaimed. “But it’s better for us to proceed on our way, for the more questions you ask, the nicer they get.”

“What’s there in this that you can’t tell me?” asked Ts’ui Lü, “But I know all about it, so there’s no need for you to keep me on pins and needles.”

Hsiang-yün blurted out laughing. “What do you know?” she said.

“That you, Miss, are Yang, and that I’m Yin,” answered Ts’ui Lü.

Hsiang-yün produced her handkerchief, and, while screening her mouth with it, burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

“What I say must be right for you to laugh in this way,” Ts’ui Lü observed.

“Perfectly right, perfectly right!” acquiesced Hsiang-yün.

“People say,” continued Ts’ui Lü, “that masters are Yang, and that servant-girls are Yin; don’t I even apprehend this primary principle?”

“You apprehend it thoroughly,” responded Hsiang-yün laughingly. But while she was speaking, she espied, under the trellis with the cinnamon roses, something glistening like gold. “Do you see that? What is it?” Hsiang-yün asked pointing at it.

Hearing this, Ts’ui Lü hastily went over and picked up the object. While scrutinising it, she observed with a smile, “Let us find out whether it’s Yin or Yang!”

So saying, she first laid hold of the unicorn, belonging to Shih Hsiang-yün, and passed it under inspection.

Shih Hsiang-yün longed to be shown what she had picked up, but Ts’ui Lü would not open her hand.

“It’s a precious gem,” she smiled. “You mayn’t see it, Miss. Where can it be from? How very strange it is! I’ve never seen any one in here with anything of the kind.”

“Give it to me and let me look at it,” retorted Hsiang-yün.

Ts’ui Lü stretched out her hand with a dash. “Yes, Miss, please look at it!” she laughed.

Hsiang-yün raised her eyes. She perceived, at a glance, that it was a golden unicorn, so beautiful and so bright; and so much larger and handsomer than the one she had on. Hsiang-yün put out her arm and, taking the gem in the palm of her hand, she fell into a silent reverie and uttered not a word. She was quite absentminded when suddenly Pao-yü appeared in the opposite direction.

“What are you two,” he asked smiling, “doing here in the sun? How is it you don’t go and find Hsi Jen?”

Shih Hsiang-yün precipitately concealed the unicorn. “We were just going,” she replied, “so let us all go together.”

Conversing, they, in a company, wended their steps into the I Hung court. Hsi Jen was leaning on the balustrade at the bottom of the steps, her face turned to the breeze. Upon unexpectedly seeing Hsiang-yün arrive she with alacrity rushed down to greet her; and taking her hand in hers, they cheerfully canvassed the

events that had transpired during their separation, while they entered the room and took a seat.

“You should have come earlier,” Pao-yü said. “I’ve got something nice and was only waiting for you.”

Saying this, he searched and searched about his person. After a long interval, “Ai-ya!” he ejaculated. “Have you perchance put that thing away?” he eagerly asked Hsi Jen.

“What thing?” inquired Hsi Jen.

“The unicorn,” explained Pao-yü, “I got the other day.”

“You’ve daily worn it about you, and how is it you ask me?” remarked Hsi Jen.

As soon as her answer fell on his ear, Pao-yü clapped his hands. “I’ve lost it!” he cried. “Where can I go and look for it!” There and then, he meant to go and search in person; but Shih Hsiang-yün heard his inquiries, and concluded that it must be he who had lost the gem. “When did you too,” she promptly smiled, “get a unicorn?”

“I got it the other day, after ever so much trouble;” rejoined Pao-yü, “but I can’t make out when I can have lost it! I’ve also become quite addle-headed.”

“Fortunately,” smiled Shih Hsiang-yün, “it’s only a sort of a toy! Still, are you so careless?” While speaking, she flung open her hand. “Just see,” she laughed, “is it this or not?”

As soon as he saw it, Pao-yü was seized with unwonted delight. But, reader, if you care to know the cause of his delight, peruse the explanation contained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Hsi Jen and Hsiang-yün tell their secret thoughts. Tai-yü is infatuated with the living Pao-yü.

While trying to conceal her sense of shame and injury Chin Ch’uan is driven by her impetuous feelings to seek death.

But to resume our narrative. At the sight of the unicorn, Pao-yü was filled with intense delight. So much so, that he forthwith put out his hand and made a grab for it. “Lucky enough it was you who picked it up!” he said, with a face beaming with smiles. “But when did you find it?”

“Fortunately it was only this!” rejoined Shih Hsiang-yün laughing. “If you by and bye also lose your seal, will you likely banish it at once from your mind, and never make an effort to discover it?”

“After all,” smiled Pao-yü, “the loss of a seal is an ordinary occurrence. But had I lost this, I would have deserved to die.”

Hsi Jen then poured a cup of tea and handed it to Shih Hsiang-yün. “Miss Senior,” she remarked smilingly, “I heard that you had occasion the other day to be highly pleased.”

Shih Hsiang-yün flushed crimson. She went on drinking her tea and did not utter a single word.

“Here you are again full of shame!” Hsi Jen smiled. “But do you remember when we were living, about ten years back, in those warm rooms on the west side and you confided in me one evening, you didn’t feel any shame then; and how is it you blush like this now?”

“Do you still speak about that!” exclaimed Shih Hsiang-yün laughingly. “You and I were then great friends. But when our mother subsequently died and I went home for a while, how is it you were at once sent to be with my cousin Secundus, and that now that I’ve come back you don’t treat me as you did once?”

“Are you yet harping on this!” retorted Hsi Jen, putting on a smile. “Why, at first, you used to coax me with a lot of endearing terms to comb your hair and to wash your face, to do this and that for you. But now that you’ve become a big girl, you assume the manner of a young mistress towards me, and as you put on these airs of a young mistress, how can I ever presume to be on a familiar

footing with you?”

“O-mi-to-fu,” cried Shih Hsiang-yün. “What a false accusation! If I be guilty of anything of the kind, may I at once die! Just see what a broiling hot day this is, and yet as soon as I arrived I felt bound to come and look you up first. If you don’t believe me, well, ask Lü Erh! And while at home, when did I not at every instant say something about you?”

Scarcely had she concluded than Hsi Jen and Pao-yü tried to soothe her. “We were only joking,” they said, “but you’ve taken everything again as gospel. What! are you still so impetuous in your temperament!”

“You don’t say,” argued Shih Hsiang-yün, “that your words are hard things to swallow, but contrariwise, call people’s temperaments impetuous!”

As she spoke, she unfolded her handkerchief and, producing a ring, she gave it to Hsi Jen.

Hsi Jen did not know how to thank her enough. “When;” she consequently smiled, “you sent those to your cousin the other day, I got one also; and here you yourself bring me another to-day! It’s clear enough therefore that you haven’t forgotten me. This alone has been quite enough to test you. As for the ring itself, what is its worth? but it’s a token of the sincerity of your heart!”

“Who gave it to you?” inquired Shih Hsiang-yün.

“Miss Pao let me have it.” replied Hsi Jen.

“I was under the impression,” remarked Hsiang-yün with a sigh, “that it was a present from cousin Lin. But is it really cousin Pao, that gave it to you! When I was at home, I day after day found myself reflecting that among all these cousins of mine, there wasn’t one able to compare with cousin Pao, so excellent is she. How I do regret that we are not the offspring of one mother! For could I boast of such a sister of the same flesh and blood as myself, it wouldn’t matter though I had lost both father and mother!”

While indulging in these regrets, her eyes got quite red.

“Never mind! never mind!” interposed Pao-yü. “Why need you speak of these things!”

“If I do allude to this,” answered Shih Hsiang-yün, “what does it matter? I know that weak point of yours. You’re in fear and trembling lest your cousin Lin should come to hear what I say, and get angry with me again for eulogising cousin Pao! Now isn’t it this, eh!”

“Ch’ih!” laughed Hsi Jen, who was standing by her. “Miss Yün,” she said, “now that you’ve grown up to be a big girl you’ve become more than ever openhearted and outspoken.”

“When I contend;” smiled Pao-yü, “that it is difficult to say a word to any one of you I’m indeed perfectly correct!”

“My dear cousin,” observed Shih Hsiang-yün laughingly, “don’t go on in that strain! You’ll provoke me to displeasure. When you are with me all you are good for is to talk and talk away; but were you to catch a glimpse of cousin Lin, you would once more be quite at a loss to know what best to do!”

“Now, enough of your jokes!” urged Hsi Jen. “I have a favour to crave of you.”

“What is it?” vehemently inquired Shih Hsiang-yün.

“I’ve got a pair of shoes,” answered Hsi Jen, “for which I’ve stuck the padding together; but I’m not feeling up to the mark these last few days, so I haven’t been able to work at them. If you have any leisure, do finish them for me.”

“This is indeed strange!” exclaimed Shih Hsiang-yün. “Putting aside all the skilful workers engaged in your household, you have besides some people for doing needlework and others for tailoring and cutting; and how is it you appeal to me to take your shoes in hand? Were you to ask any one of those men to execute your work, who could very well refuse to do it?”

“Here you are in another stupid mood!” laughed Hsi Jen. “Can it be that you don’t know that our sewing in these quarters mayn’t be done by these needleworkers.”

At this reply, it at once dawned upon Shih Hsiang-yün that the shoes must be intended for Pao-yü. “Since that be the case,” she in consequence smiled; “I’ll work them for you. There’s however one thing. I’ll readily attend to any of yours, but I will have nothing to do with any for other people.”

“There you are again!” laughed Hsi Jen. “Who am I to venture to trouble you to make shoes for me? I’ll tell you plainly, however, that they are not mine. But no matter whose they are, it is anyhow I who’ll be the recipient of your favour; that is sufficient.”

“To speak the truth,” rejoined Shih Hsiang-yün, “you’ve put me to the trouble of working, I don’t know how many things for you. The reason why I refuse on this occasion should be quite evident to you!”

“I can’t nevertheless make it out!” answered Hsi Jen.

“I heard the other day,” continued Shih Hsiang-yün, a sardonic smile on her lip, “that while the fan-case, I had worked, was being held and compared with that of some one else, it too was slashed away in a fit of high dudgeon. This reached my ears long ago, and do you still try to dupe me by asking me again now to make something more for you? Have I really become a slave to you people?

“As to what occurred the other day,” hastily explained Pao-yü smiling, “I positively had no idea that that thing was your handiwork.”

“He never knew that you’d done it,” Hsi Jen also laughed. “I deceived him by telling him that there had been of late some capital hands at needlework outside, who could execute any embroidery with surpassing beauty, and that I had asked them to bring a fan-case so as to try them and to see whether they could actually work well or not. He at once believed what I said. But as he produced the case and gave it to this one and that one to look at, he somehow or other, I don’t know how, managed again to put some one’s back up, and she cut it into two. On his return, however, he bade me hurry the men to make another; and when at length I explained to him that it had been worked by you, he felt, I can’t tell you, what keen regret!”

“This is getting stranger and stranger!” said Shih Hsiang-yün. “It wasn’t worth the while for Miss Lin to lose her temper about it. But as she plies the scissors so admirably, why, you might as well tell her to finish the shoes for you.”

“She couldn’t,” replied Hsi Jen, “for besides other things our venerable lady is still in fear and trembling lest she should tire herself in any way. The doctor likewise says that she will continue to enjoy good health, so long as she is carefully looked after; so who would wish to ask her to take them in hand? Last year she managed to just get through a scented bag, after a whole year’s work.

But here we've already reached the middle of the present year, and she hasn't yet taken up any needle or thread!"

In the course of their conversation, a servant came and announced 'that the gentleman who lived in the Hsing Lung Street had come.' "Our master," he added, "bids you, Mr. Secundus, come out and greet him."

As soon as Pao-yü heard this announcement, he knew that Chia Yü-ts'un must have arrived. But he felt very unhappy at heart. Hsi Jen hurried to go and bring his clothes. Pao-yü, meanwhile, put on his boots, but as he did so, he gave way to resentment. "Why there's father," he soliloquised, "to sit with him; that should be enough; and must he, on every visit he pays, insist upon seeing me!"

"It is, of course, because you have such a knack for receiving and entertaining visitors that Mr. Chia Cheng will have you go out," laughingly interposed Shih Hsiang-yün from one side, as she waved her fan.

"Is it father's doing?" Pao-yü rejoined. "Why, it's he himself who asks that I should be sent for to see him."

"'When a host is courteous, visitors come often,'" smiled Hsiang-yün, "so it's surely because you possess certain qualities, which have won his regard, that he insists upon seeing you."

"But I am not what one would call courteous," demurred Pao-yü. "I am, of all coarse people, the coarsest. Besides, I do not choose to have any relations with such people as himself."

"Here's again that unchangeable temperament of yours!" laughed Hsiang-yün. "But you're a big fellow now, and you should at least, if you be loth to study and go and pass your examinations for a provincial graduate or a metropolitan graduate, have frequent intercourse with officers and ministers of state and discuss those varied attainments, which one acquires in an official career, so that you also may be able in time to have some idea about matters in general; and that when by and bye you've made friends, they may not see you spending the whole day long in doing nothing than loafing in our midst, up to every imaginable mischief."

"Miss," exclaimed Pao-yü, after this harangue, "pray go and sit in some other girl's room, for mind one like myself may contaminate a person who knows so

much of attainments and experience as you do."

"Miss," ventured Hsi Jen, "drop this at once! Last time Miss Pao too tendered him this advice, but without troubling himself as to whether people would feel uneasy or not, he simply came out with an ejaculation of 'hai,' and rushed out of the place. Miss Pao hadn't meanwhile concluded her say, so when she saw him fly, she got so full of shame that, flushing scarlet, she could neither open her lips, nor hold her own counsel. But lucky for him it was only Miss Pao. Had it been Miss Lin, there's no saying what row there may not have been again, and what tears may not have been shed! Yet the very mention of all she had to tell him is enough to make people look up to Miss Pao with respect. But after a time, she also betook herself away. I then felt very unhappy as I imagined that she was angry; but contrary to all my expectations, she was by and bye just the same as ever. She is, in very truth, long-suffering and indulgent! This other party contrariwise became quite distant to her, little though one would have thought it of him; and as Miss Pao perceived that he had lost his temper, and didn't choose to heed her, she subsequently made I don't know how many apologies to him."

"Did Miss Lin ever talk such trash!" exclaimed Pao-yü. "Had she ever talked such stuff and nonsense, I would have long ago become chilled towards her."

"What you say is all trash!" Hsi Jen and Hsiang-yün remarked with one voice, while they shook their heads to and fro and smiled.

Lin Tai-yü, the fact is, was well aware that now that Shih Hsiang-yün was staying in the mansion, Pao-yü too was certain to hasten to come and tell her all about the unicorn he had got, so she thought to herself: "In the foreign traditions and wild stories, introduced here of late by Pao-yü, literary persons and pretty girls are, for the most part, brought together in marriage, through the agency of some trifling but ingenious nicknack. These people either have miniature ducks, or phoenixes, jade necklets or gold pendants, fine handkerchiefs or elegant sashes; and they have, through the instrumentality of such trivial objects, invariably succeeded in accomplishing the wishes they entertained throughout their lives." When she recently discovered, by some unforeseen way, that Pao-yü had likewise a unicorn she began to apprehend lest he should make this circumstance a pretext to create an estrangement with her, and indulge with Shih Hsiang-yün as well in various free and easy flirtations and fine doings. She therefore quietly crossed over to watch her opportunity and take such action as would enable her to get an insight into his and her sentiments. Contrary,

however, to all her calculations, no sooner did she reach her destination, than she overheard Shih Hsiang-yün dilate on the topic of experience, and Pao-yü go on to observe: “Cousin Lin has never indulged in such stuff and nonsense. Had she ever uttered any such trash, I would have become chilled even towards her!” This language suddenly produced, in Lin Tai-yü‘s mind, both surprise as well as delight; sadness as well as regret. Delight, at having indeed been so correct in her perception that he whom she had ever considered in the light of a true friend had actually turned out to be a true friend. Surprise, “because,” she said to herself: “he has, in the presence of so many witnesses, displayed such partiality as to speak in my praise, and has shown such affection and friendliness for me as to make no attempt whatever to shirk suspicion.” Regret, “for since,” (she pondered), “you are my intimate friend, you could certainly well look upon me too as your intimate friend; and if you and I be real friends, why need there be any more talk about gold and jade? But since there be that question of gold and jade, you and I should have such things in our possession. Yet, why should this Pao-ch’ai step in again between us?” Sad, “because,” (she reflected), “my father and mother departed life at an early period; and because I have, in spite of the secret engraven on my heart and imprinted on my bones, not a soul to act as a mentor to me. Besides, of late, I continuously feel confusion creep over my mind, so my disease must already have gradually developed itself. The doctors further state that my breath is weak and my blood poor, and that they dread lest consumption should declare itself, so despite that sincere friendship I foster for you, I cannot, I fear, last for very long. You are, I admit, a true friend to me, but what can you do for my unfortunate destiny!”

Upon reaching this point in her reflections, she could not control her tears, and they rolled freely down her cheeks. So much so, that when about to enter and meet her cousins, she experienced such utter lack of zest, that, while drying her tears she turned round, and wended her steps back in the direction of her apartments.

Pao-yü, meanwhile, had hurriedly got into his new costume. Upon coming out of doors, he caught sight of Lin Tai-yü, walking quietly ahead of him engaged, to all appearances, in wiping tears from her eyes. With rapid stride, he overtook her.

“Cousin Lin,” he smiled, “where are you off to? How is it that you’re crying again? Who has once more hurt your feelings?”

Lin Tai-yü turned her head round to look; and seeing that it was Pao-yü, she at once forced a smile. “Why should I be crying,” she replied, “when there is no reason to do so?”

“Look here!” observed Pao-yü smilingly. “The tears in your eyes are not dry yet and do you still tell me a fib?”

Saying this, he could not check an impulse to raise his arm and wipe her eyes, but Lin Tai-yü speedily withdrew several steps backwards. “Are you again bent,” she said, “upon compassing your own death! Then why do you knock your hands and kick your feet about in this wise?”

“While intent upon speaking, I forgot,” smiled Pao-yü, “all about propriety and gesticulated, yet quite inadvertently. But what care I whether I die or live!”

“To die would, after all” added Lin Tai-yü, “be for you of no matter; but you’ll leave behind some gold or other, and a unicorn too or other; and what would they do?”

This insinuation was enough to plunge Pao-yü into a fresh fit of exasperation. Hastening up to her: “Do you still give vent to such language?” he asked. “Why, it’s really tantamount to invoking imprecations on me! What, are you yet angry with me!”

This question recalled to Lin Tai-yü‘s mind the incidents of a few days back, and a pang of remorse immediately gnawed her heart for having been again so indiscreet in her speech. “Now don’t you distress your mind!” she observed hastily, smiling. “I verily said what I shouldn’t! Yet what is there in this to make your veins protrude, and to so provoke you as to bedew your whole face with perspiration?”

While reasoning with him, she felt unable to repress herself, and, approaching him, she extended her hand, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

Pao-yü gazed intently at her for a long time. “Do set your mind at ease!” he at length observed.

At this remark, Lin Tai-yü felt quite nervous. “What’s there to make my mind uneasy?” she asked after a protracted interval. “I can’t make out what you’re driving at; tell me what’s this about making me easy or uneasy?”

Pao-yü heaved a sigh. “Don’t you truly fathom the depth of my words?” he inquired. “Why, do you mean to say that I’ve throughout made such poor use of my love for you as not to be able to even divine your feelings? Well, if so, it’s no wonder that you daily lose your temper on my account!”

“I actually don’t understand what you mean by easy or uneasy,” Lin Tai-yü replied.

“My dear girl,” urged Pao-yü, nodding and sighing. “Don’t be making a fool of me! For if you can’t make out these words, not only have I ever uselessly lavished affection upon you, but the regard, with which you have always treated me, has likewise been entirely of no avail! And it’s mostly because you won’t set your mind at ease that your whole frame is riddled with disease. Had you taken things easier a bit, this ailment of yours too wouldn’t have grown worse from day to day!”

These words made Lin Tai-yü feel as if she had been blasted by thunder, or struck by lightning. But after carefully weighing them within herself, they seemed to her far more fervent than any that might have emanated from the depths of her own heart, and thousands of sentiments, in fact, thronged together in her mind; but though she had every wish to frame them into language, she found it a hard task to pronounce so much as half a word. All she therefore did was to gaze at him with vacant stare.

Pao-yü fostered innumerable thoughts within himself, but unable in a moment to resolve from which particular one to begin, he too absently looked at Tai-yü. Thus it was that the two cousins remained for a long time under the spell of a deep reverie.

An ejaculation of “Hai!” was the only sound that issued from Lin Tai-yü‘s lips; and while tears streamed suddenly from her eyes, she turned herself round and started on her way homeward.

Pao-yü jumped forward, with alacrity, and dragged her back. “My dear cousin,” he pleaded, “do stop a bit! Let me tell you just one thing; after that, you may go.”

“What can you have to tell me?” exclaimed Lin Tai-yü, who while wiping her tears, extricated her hand from his grasp. “I know.” she cried, “all you have to say.”

As she spoke, she went away, without even turning her head to cast a glance behind her.

As Pao-yü gazed at her receding figure, he fell into abstraction.

He had, in fact, quitted his apartments a few moments back in such precipitate hurry that he had omitted to take a fan with him: and Hsi Jen, fearing lest he might suffer from the heat, promptly seized one and ran to find him and give it to him. But upon casually raising her head, she espied Lin Tai-yü standing with him. After a time, Tai-yü walked away; and as he still remained where he was without budging, she approached him.

“You left,” she said, “without even taking a fan with you. Happily I noticed it, and so hurried to catch you up and bring it to you.”

But Pao-yü was so lost in thought that as soon as he caught Hsi Jen’s voice, he made a dash and clasped her in his embrace, without so much as trying to make sure who she was.

“My dear cousin,” he cried, “I couldn’t hitherto muster enough courage to disclose the secrets of my heart; but on this occasion I shall make bold and give utterance to them. For you I’m quite ready to even pay the penalty of death. I have too for your sake brought ailments upon my whole frame. It’s in here! But I haven’t ventured to breathe it to any one. My only alternative has been to bear it patiently, in the hope that when you got all right, I might then perchance also recover. But whether I sleep, or whether I dream, I never, never forget you.”

These declarations quite dumfoundered Hsi Jen. She gave way to incessant apprehensions. All she could do was to shout out: “Oh spirits, oh heaven, oh Buddha, he’s compassing my death!” Then pushing him away from her, “what is it you’re saying?” she asked. “May it be that you are possessed by some evil spirit! Don’t you quick get yourself off?”

This brought Pao-yü to his senses at once. He then became aware that it was Hsi Jen, and that she had come to bring him a fan. Pao-yü was overpowered with shame; his whole face was suffused with scarlet; and, snatching the fan out of her hands, he bolted away with rapid stride.

When Hsi Jen meanwhile saw Pao-yü effect his escape, “Lin Tai-yü,” she pondered, “must surely be at the bottom of all he said just now. But from what

one can see, it will be difficult, in the future, to obviate the occurrence of some unpleasant mishap. It's sufficient to fill one with fear and trembling!"

At this point in her cogitations, she involuntarily melted into tears, so agitated was she; while she secretly exercised her mind how best to act so as to prevent this dreadful calamity.

But while she was lost in this maze of surmises and doubts, Pao-ch'ai unexpectedly appeared from the off side. "What!" she smilingly exclaimed, "are you dreaming away in a hot broiling sun like this?"

Hsi Jen, at this question, hastily returned her smiles. "Those two birds," she answered, "were having a fight, and such fun was it that I stopped to watch them."

"Where is cousin Pao off to now in such a hurry, got up in that fine attire?" asked Pao-ch'ai, "I just caught sight of him, as he went by. I meant to have called out and stopped him, but as he, of late, talks greater rubbish than ever, I didn't challenge him, but let him go past."

"Our master," rejoined Hsi Jen, "sent for him to go out."

"Ai-yah!" hastily exclaimed Pao-ch'ai, as soon as this remark reached her ears. "What does he want him for, on a scalding day like this? Might he not have thought of something and got so angry about it as to send for him to give him a lecture!"

"If it isn't this," added Hsi Jen laughing, "some visitor must, I presume, have come and he wishes him to meet him."

"With weather like this," smiled Pao-ch'ai, "even visitors afford no amusement! Why don't they, while this fiery temperature lasts, stay at home, where it's much cooler, instead of gadding about all over the place?"

"Could you tell them so?" smiled Hsi Jen.

"What was that girl Hsiang-yün doing in your quarters?" Pao-ch'ai then asked.

"She only came to chat with us on irrelevant matters." Hsi Jen replied smiling. "But did you see the pair of shoes I was pasting the other day? Well, I meant to

ask her tomorrow to finish them for me."

Pao-chai, at these words, turned her head round, first on this side, and then on the other. Seeing that there was no one coming or going: "How is it," she smiled, "that you, who have so much gumption, don't ever show any respect for people's feelings? I've been of late keeping an eye on Miss Yün's manner, and, from what I can glean from the various rumours afloat, she can't be, in the slightest degree, her own mistress at home! In that family of theirs, so little can they stand the burden of any heavy expenses that they don't employ any needlework-people, and ordinary everyday things are mostly attended to by their ladies themselves. (If not), why is it that every time she has come to us on a visit, and she and I have had a chat, she at once broached the subject of their being in great difficulties at home, the moment she perceived that there was no one present? Yet, whenever I went on to ask her a few questions about their usual way of living, her very eyes grew red, while she made some indistinct reply; but as for speaking out, she wouldn't. But when I consider the circumstances in which she is placed, for she has certainly had the misfortune of being left, from her very infancy, without father and mother, the very sight of her is too much for me, and my heart begins to bleed within me."

"Quite so! Quite so!" observed Hsi Jen, clapping her hands, after listening to her throughout. "It isn't strange then if she let me have the ten butterfly knots I asked her to tie for me only after ever so many days, and if she said that they were coarsely done, but that I should make the best of them and use them elsewhere, and that if I wanted any nice ones, I should wait until by and bye when she came to stay here, when she would work some neatly for me. What you've told me now reminds me that, as she had found it difficult to find an excuse when we appealed to her, she must have had to slave away, who knows how much, till the third watch in the middle of the night. What a stupid thing I was! Had I known this sooner, I would never have told her a word about it."

"Last time;" continued Pao-ch'ai, "she told me that when she was at home she had ample to do, that she kept busy as late as the third watch, and that, if she did the slightest stitch of work for any other people, the various ladies, belonging to her family, did not like it."

"But as it happens," explained Hsi Jen, "that mulish-minded and perverse-tempered young master of ours won't allow the least bit of needlework, no matter whether small or large, to be made by those persons employed to do

sewing in the household. And as for me, I have no time to turn my attention to all these things."

"Why mind him?" laughed Pao-ch'ai. "Simply ask some one to do the work and finish."

"How could one bamboozle him?" resumed Hsi Jen. "Why, he'll promptly find out everything. Such a thing can't even be suggested. The only thing I can do is to quietly slave away, that's all."

"You shouldn't work so hard," smiled Pao-ch'ai. "What do you say to my doing a few things for you?"

"Are you in real earnest!" ventured Hsi Jen smiling. "Well, in that case, it is indeed a piece of good fortune for me! I'll come over myself in the evening."

But before she could conclude her reply, she of a sudden noticed an old matron come up to her with precipitate step. "Where does the report come from," she interposed, "that Miss Chin Ch'uan-erh has gone, for no rhyme or reason, and committed suicide by jumping into the well?"

This bit of news startled Hsi Jen. "Which Chin Ch'uan-erh is it," she speedily inquired.

"Where are two Chin Ch'uan-erhs to be found!" rejoined the old matron. "It's the one in our Mistress,' Madame Wang's, apartments, who was the other day sent away for something or other, I don't know what. On her return home, she raised her groans to the skies and shed profuse tears, but none of them worried their minds about her, until, who'd have thought it, they could see nothing of her. A servant, however, went just now to draw water and he says that 'while he was getting it from the well in the south-east corner, he caught sight of a dead body, that he hurriedly called men to his help, and that when they fished it out, they unexpectedly found that it was she, but that though they bustled about trying to bring her round, everything proved of no avail'"

"This is odd!" Pao-ch'ai exclaimed.

The moment Hsi Jen heard the tidings, she shook her head and moaned. At the remembrance of the friendship, which had ever existed between them, tears suddenly trickled down her cheeks. And as for Pao-ch'ai, she listened to the

account of the accident and then hastened to Madame Wang's quarters to try and afford her consolation.

Hsi Jen, during this interval, returned to her room. But we will leave her without further notice, and explain that when Pao-ch'ai reached the interior of Madame Wang's home, she found everything plunged in perfect stillness. Madame Wang was seated all alone in the inner chamber indulging her sorrow. But such difficulties did Pao-ch'ai experience to allude to the occurrence, that her only alternative was to take a seat next to her.

"Where do you come from?" asked Madame Wang.

"I come from inside the garden," answered Pao-ch'ai.

"As you come from the garden," Madame Wang inquired, "did you see anything of your cousin Pao-yü?"

"I saw him just now," Pao-ch'ai replied, "go out, dressed up in his fineries. But where he is gone to, I don't know."

"Have you perchance heard of any strange occurrence?" asked Madame Wang, while she nodded her head and sighed. "Why, Chin Ch'uan Erh jumped into the well and committed suicide."

"How is it that she jumped into the well when there was nothing to make her do so?" Pao-ch'ai inquired. "This is indeed a remarkable thing!"

"The fact is," proceeded Madame Wang, "that she spoilt something the other day, and in a sudden fit of temper, I gave her a slap and sent her away, simply meaning to be angry with her for a few days and then bring her in again. But, who could have ever imagined that she had such a resentful temperament as to go and drown herself in a well! And is not this all my fault?"

"It's because you are such a kind-hearted person, aunt," smiled Pao-ch'ai, "that such ideas cross your mind! But she didn't jump into the well when she was in a tantrum; so what must have made her do so was that she had to go and live in the lower quarters. Or, she might have been standing in front of the well, and her foot slipped, and she fell into it. While in the upper rooms, she used to be kept under restraint, so when this time she found herself outside, she must, of course, have felt the wish to go strolling all over the place in search of fun. How could

she have ever had such a fiery disposition? But even admitting that she had such a temper, she was, after all, a stupid girl to do as she did; and she doesn't deserve any pity."

"In spite of what you say," sighed Madame Wang, shaking her head to and fro, "I really feel unhappy at heart."

"You shouldn't, aunt, distress your mind about it!" Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Yet, if you feel very much exercised, just give her a few more taels than you would otherwise have done, and let her be buried. You'll thus carry out to the full the feelings of a mistress towards her servant."

"I just now gave them fifty taels for her," pursued Madame Wang. "I also meant to let them have some of your cousin's new clothes to enshroud her in. But, who'd have thought it, none of the girls had, strange coincidence, any newly-made articles of clothing; and there were only that couple of birthday suits of your cousin Lin's. But as your cousin Lin has ever been such a sensitive child and has always too suffered and ailed, I thought it would be unpropitious for her, if her clothes were also now handed to people to wrap their dead in, after she had been told that they were given her for her birthday. So I ordered a tailor to get a suit for her as soon as possible. Had it been any other servant-girl, I could have given her a few taels and have finished. But Chin Ch'uan-erh was, albeit a servant-maid, nearly as dear to me as if she had been a daughter of mine."

Saying this, tears unwittingly ran down from her eyes.

"Aunt!" vehemently exclaimed Pao-ch'ai. "What earthly use is it of hurrying a tailor just now to prepare clothes for her? I have a couple of suits I made the other day and won't it save trouble were I to go and bring them for her? Besides, when she was alive, she used to wear my old clothes. And what's more our figures are much alike."

"What you say is all very well," rejoined Madame Wang; "but can it be that it isn't distasteful to you?"

"Compose your mind," urged Pao-ch'ai with a smile. "I have never paid any heed to such things."

As she spoke, she rose to her feet and walked away.

Madame Wang then promptly called two servants. “Go and accompany Miss Pao!” she said.

In a brief space of time, Pao-ch’ai came back with the clothes, and discovered Pao-yü seated next to Madame Wang, all melted in tears. Madame Wang was reasoning with him. At the sight of Pao-ch’ai, she, at once, desisted. When Pao-ch’ai saw them go on in this way, and came to weigh their conversation and to scan the expression on their countenances, she immediately got a pretty correct insight into their feelings. But presently she handed over the clothes, and Madame Wang sent for Chin Ch’uan-erh’s mother, to take them away.

But, reader, you will have to peruse the next chapter for further details.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A brother is prompted by ill-feeling to wag his tongue a bit. A depraved son receives heavy blows with a rattan cane.

Madame Wang, for we shall now continue our story, sent for Chin Ch’uan-erh’s mother. On her arrival, she gave her several hairpins and rings, and then told her that she could invite several Buddhist priests as well to read the prayers necessary to release the spirit from purgatory. The mother prostrated herself and expressed her gratitude; after which, she took her leave.

Indeed, Pao-yü, on his return from entertaining Yü-ts’un, heard the tidings that Chin Ch’uan-erh had been instigated by a sense of shame to take her own life and he at once fell a prey to grief. So much so, that, when he came inside, and was again spoken to and admonished by Madame Wang, he could not utter a single word in his justification. But as soon as he perceived Pao-ch’ai make her appearance in the room, he seized the opportunity to scamper out in precipitate haste. Whither he was trudging, he himself had not the least idea. But throwing his hands behind his back and drooping his head against his chest, he gave way to sighs, while with slow and listless step he turned towards the hall. Scarcely, however, had he rounded the screen-wall, which stood in front of the doorway, when, by a strange coincidence, he ran straight into the arms of some one, who was unawares approaching from the opposite direction, and was just about to go

towards the inner portion of the compound.

“Hallo!” that person was heard to cry out, as he stood still.

Pao-yü sustained a dreadful start. Raising his face to see, he discovered that it was no other than his father. At once, he unconsciously drew a long breath and adopted the only safe course of dropping his arms against his body and standing on one side.

“Why are you,” exclaimed Chia Cheng, “drooping your head in such a melancholy mood, and indulging in all these moans? When Yü-ts’un came just now and he asked to see you, you only put in your appearance after a long while. But though you did come, you were not in the least disposed to chat with anything like cheerfulness and animation; you behaved, as you ever do, like a regular fool. I detected then in your countenance a certain expression of some hidden hankering and sadness; and now again here you are groaning and sighing! Does all you have not suffice to please you? Are you still dissatisfied? You’ve no reason to be like this, so why is it that you go on in this way?”

Pao-yü had ever, it is true, shown a glib tongue, but on the present occasion he was so deeply affected by Chin Ch’uan-erh’s fate, and vexed at not being able to die that very instant and follow in her footsteps that although he was now fully conscious that his father was speaking to him he could not, in fact, lend him an ear, but simply stood in a timid and nervous mood. Chia Cheng noticed that he was in a state of trembling and fear, not as ready with an answer as he usually was, and his sorry plight somewhat incensed him, much though he had not at first borne him any ill-feeling. But just as he was about to chide him, a messenger approached and announced to him: “Some one has come from the mansion of the imperial Prince Chung Shun, and wishes to see you, Sir.” At this announcement, surmises sprung up in Chia Cheng’s mind. “Hitherto,” he secretly mused, “I’ve never had any dealings with the Chung Shun mansion, and why is it that some one is despatched here to-day?” As he gave way to these reflections. “Be quick,” he shouted, “and ask him to take a seat in the pavilion,” while he himself precipitately entered the inner room and changed his costume. When he came out to greet the visitor, he discovered that it was the senior officer of the Chung Shun mansion. After the exchange of the salutations prescribed by the rites, they sat down and tea was presented. But before (Chia Cheng) had had time to start a topic of conversation, the senior officer anticipated him, and speedily observed: “Your humble servant does not pay this visit to-day to your

worthy mansion on his own authority, but entirely in compliance with instructions received, as there is a favour that I have to beg of you. I make bold to trouble you, esteemed Sir, on behalf of his highness, to take any steps you might deem suitable, and if you do, not only will his highness remember your kindness, but even I, your humble servant, and my colleagues will feel extremely grateful to you."

Chia Cheng listened to him, but he could not nevertheless get a clue of what he was driving at. Promptly returning his smile, he rose to his feet. "You come, Sir," he inquired, "at the instance of his royal highness, but what, I wonder, are the commands you have to give me? I hope you will explain them to your humble servant, worthy Sir, in order to enable him to carry them out effectively."

The senior officer gave a sardonic smile.

"There's nothing to carry out," he said. "All you, venerable Sir, have to do is to utter one single word and the whole thing will be effected. There is in our mansion a certain Ch'i Kuan, who plays the part of young ladies. He hitherto stayed quietly in the mansion; but for the last three or five days or so no one has seen him return home. Search has been instituted in every locality, yet his whereabouts cannot be discovered. But throughout these various inquiries, eight out of the ten tenths of the inhabitants of the city have, with one consent, asserted that he has of late been on very friendly terms with that honourable son of yours, who was born with the jade in his mouth. This report was told your servant and his colleagues, but as your worthy mansion is unlike such residences as we can take upon ourselves to enter and search with impunity, we felt under the necessity of laying the matter before our imperial master. 'Had it been any of the other actors,' his highness also says, 'I wouldn't have minded if even one hundred of them had disappeared; but this Ch'i Kuan has always been so ready with pat repartee, so respectful and trustworthy that he has thoroughly won my aged heart, and I could never do without him.' He entreats you, therefore, worthy Sir, to, in your turn, plead with your illustrious scion, and request him to let Ch'i Kuan go back, in order that the feelings, which prompt the Prince to make such earnest supplications, may, in the first place, be satisfied: and that, in the next, your mean servant and his associates may be spared the fatigue of toiling and searching."

At the conclusion of this appeal, he promptly made a low bow. As soon as Chia Cheng found out the object of his errand, he felt both astonishment and

displeasure. With all promptitude, he issued directions that Pao-yü should be told to come out of the garden. Pao-yü had no notion whatever why he was wanted. So speedily he hurried to appear before his father.

“What a regular scoundrel you are!” Chia Cheng exclaimed. “It is enough that you won’t read your books at home; but will you also go in for all these lawless and wrongful acts? That Ch’i Kuan is a person whose present honourable duties are to act as an attendant on his highness the Prince of Chung Shun, and how extremely heedless of propriety must you be to have enticed him, without good cause, to come away, and thus have now brought calamity upon me?”

These reproaches plunged Pao-yü in a dreadful state of consternation. With alacrity he said by way of reply: “I really don’t know anything about the matter! To what do, after all, the two words Ch’i Kuan refer, I wonder! Still less, besides, am I aware what entice can imply!”

As he spoke, he started crying.

But before Chia Cheng could open his month to pass any further remarks, “Young gentleman,” he heard the senior officer interpose with a sardonic smile: “you shouldn’t conceal anything! if he be either hidden in your home, or if you know his whereabouts, divulge the truth at once; so that less trouble should fall to our lot than otherwise would. And will we not then bear in mind your virtue, worthy scion!”

“I positively don’t know.” Pao-yü time after time maintained. “There must, I fear, be some false rumour abroad; for I haven’t so much as seen anything of him.”

The senior officer gave two loud smiles, full of derision. “There’s evidence at hand,” he rejoined, “so if you compel me to speak out before your venerable father, won’t you, young man, have to suffer the consequences? But as you assert that you don’t know who this person is, how is it that that red sash has come to be attached to your waist?”

When Pao-yü caught this allusion, he suddenly felt quite out of his senses. He stared and gaped; while within himself, he argued: “How has he come to hear anything about this! But since he knows all these secret particulars, I cannot, I expect, put him off in other points; so wouldn’t it be better for me to pack him off, in order to obviate his blubbering anything more?” “Sir,” he consequently

remarked aloud, “how is it that despite your acquaintance with all these minute details, you have no inkling of his having purchased a house? Are you ignorant of an essential point like this? I’ve heard people say that he’s, at present, staying in the eastern suburbs at a distance of twenty li from the city walls; at some place or other called Tzu T’an Pao, and that he has bought there several acres of land and a few houses. So I presume he’s to be found in that locality; but of course there’s no saying.”

“According to your version,” smiled the senior officer, as soon as he heard his explanation, “he must for a certainty be there. I shall therefore go and look for him. If he’s there, well and good; but if not, I shall come again and request you to give me further directions.”

These words were still on his lips, when he took his leave and walked off with hurried step.

Chia Cheng was by this time stirred up to such a pitch of indignation that his eyes stared aghast, and his mouth opened in bewilderment; and as he escorted the officer out, he turned his head and bade Pao-yü not budge. “I have,” (he said), “to ask you something on my return.” Straightway he then went to see the officer off. But just as he was turning back, he casually came across Chia Huan and several servant-boys running wildly about in a body. “Quick, bring him here to me!” shouted Chia Cheng to the young boys. “I want to beat him.”

Chia Huan, at the sight of his father, was so terrified that his bones mollified and his tendons grew weak, and, promptly lowering his head, he stood still.”

“What are you running about for?” Chia Cheng asked. “These menials of yours do not mind you, but go who knows where, and let you roam about like a wild horse! Where are the attendants who wait on you at school?” he cried.

When Chia Huan saw his father in such a dreadful rage, he availed himself of the first opportunity to try and clear himself. “I wasn’t running about just now” he said. “But as I was passing by the side of that well, I caught sight, for in that well a servant-girl was drowned, of a human head that large, a body that swollen, floating about in really a frightful way and I therefore hastily rushed past.”

Chia Cheng was thunderstruck by this disclosure. “There’s been nothing up, so who has gone and jumped into the well?” he inquired. “Never has there been anything of the kind in my house before! Ever since the time of our ancestors,

servants have invariably been treated with clemency and consideration. But I expect that I must of late have become remiss in my domestic affairs, and that the managers must have arrogated to themselves the right of domineering and so been the cause of bringing about such calamities as violent deaths and disregard of life. Were these things to reach the ears of people outside, what will become of the reputation of our seniors? Call Chia Lien and Lai Ta here!" he shouted.

The servant-lads signified their obedience, with one voice. They were about to go and summon them, when Chia Huan hastened to press forward. Grasping the lapel of Chia Cheng's coat, and clinging to his knees, he knelt down. "Father, why need you be angry?" he said. "Excluding the people in Madame Wang's rooms, this occurrence is entirely unknown to any of the rest; and I have heard my mother mention…." At this point, he turned his head, and cast a glance in all four quarters.

Chia Cheng guessed his meaning, and made a sign with his eyes. The young boys grasped his purpose and drew far back on either side.

Chia Huan resumed his confidences in a low tone of voice. "My mother," he resumed, "told me that when brother Pao-yü was, the other day, in Madame Wang's apartments, he seized her servant-maid Chin Ch'uan-erh with the intent of dishonouring her. That as he failed to carry out his design, he gave her a thrashing, which so exasperated Chin Ch'uan-erh that she threw herself into the well and committed suicide…."

Before however he could conclude his account, Chia Cheng had been incensed to such a degree that his face assumed the colour of silver paper. "Bring Pao-yü here," he cried. While uttering these orders, he walked into the study. "If any one does again to-day come to dissuade me," he vociferated, "I shall take this official hat, and sash, my home and private property and surrender everything at once to him to go and bestow them upon Pao-yü; for if I cannot escape blame (with a son like the one I have), I mean to shave this scanty trouble-laden hair about my temples and go in search of some unsullied place where I can spend the rest of my days alone! I shall thus also avoid the crime of heaping, above, insult upon my predecessors, and, below, of having given birth to such a rebellious son."

At the sight of Chia Cheng in this exasperation, the family companions and attendants speedily realised that Pao-yü must once more be the cause of it, and the whole posse hastened to withdraw from the study, biting their fingers and

putting their tongues out.

Chia Cheng panted with excitement. He stretched his chest out and sat bolt upright on a chair. His whole face was covered with the traces of tears. “Bring Pao-yü! Bring Pao-yü!” he shouted consecutively. “Fetch a big stick; bring a rope and tie him up; close all the doors! If any one does communicate anything about it in the inner rooms, why, I’ll immediately beat him to death.”

The servant-boys felt compelled to express their obedience with one consent, and some of them came to look after Pao-yü.

As for Pao-yü, when he heard Chia Cheng enjoin him not to move, he forthwith became aware that the chances of an unpropitious issue outnumbered those of a propitious one, but how could he have had any idea that Chia Huan as well had put in his word? There he still stood in the pavilion, revolving in his mind how he could get some one to speed inside and deliver a message for him. But, as it happened, not a soul appeared. He was quite at a loss to know where even Pei Ming could be. His longing was at its height, when he perceived an old nurse come on the scene. The sight of her exulted Pao-yü, just as much as if he had obtained pearls or gems; and hurriedly approaching her, he dragged her and forced her to halt. “Go in,” he urged, “at once and tell them that my father wishes to beat me to death. Be quick, be quick, for it’s urgent, there’s no time to be lost.”

But, first and foremost, Pao-yü‘s excitement was so intense that he spoke with indistinctness. In the second place, the old nurse was, as luck would have it, dull of hearing, so that she did not catch the drift of what he said, and she misconstrued the two words: “it’s urgent,” for the two representing jumped into the well. Readily smiling therefore: “If she wants to jump into the well, let her do so,” she said. “What’s there to make you fear, Master Secundus?”

“Go out,” pursued Pao-yü, in despair, on discovering that she was deaf, “and tell my page to come.”

“What’s there left unsettled?” rejoined the old nurse. “Everything has been finished long ago! A tip has also been given them; so how is it things are not settled?”

Pao-yü fidgetted with his hands and feet. He was just at his wits’ ends, when he espied Chia Cheng’s servant-boys come up and press him to go out.

As soon as Chia Cheng caught sight of him, his eyes got quite red. Without even allowing himself any time to question him about his gadding about with actors, and the presents he gave them on the sly, during his absence from home; or about his playing the truant from school and lewdly importuning his mother's maid, during his stay at home, he simply shouted: "Gag his mouth and positively beat him till he dies!"

The servant-boys did not have the boldness to disobey him. They were under the necessity of seizing Pao-yü, of stretching him on a bench, and of taking a heavy rattan and giving him about ten blows.

Pao-yü knew well enough that he could not plead for mercy, and all he could do was to whimper and cry.

Chia Cheng however found fault with the light blows they administered to him. With one kick he shoved the castigator aside, and snatching the rattan into his own hands, he spitefully let (Pao-yü) have ten blows and more.

Pao-yü had not, from his very birth, experienced such anguish. From the outset, he found the pain unbearable; yet he could shout and weep as boisterously as ever he pleased; but so weak subsequently did his breath, little by little, become, so hoarse his voice, and so choked his throat that he could not bring out any sound.

The family companions noticed that he was beaten in a way that might lead to an unpropitious end, and they drew near with all despatch and made earnest entreaties and exhortations. But would Chia Cheng listen to them?

"You people," he answered, "had better ask him whether the tricks he has been up to deserve to be overlooked or not! It's you who have all along so thoroughly spoilt him as to make him reach this degree of depravity! And do you yet come to advise me to spare him? When by and bye you've incited him to commit parricide or regicide, you will at length, then, give up trying to dissuade me, eh?"

This language jarred on the ears of the whole party; and knowing only too well that he was in an exasperated mood, they fussed about endeavouring to find some one to go in and convey the news.

But Madame Wang did not presume to be the first to inform dowager lady Chia about it. Seeing no other course open to her, she hastily dressed herself and

issued out of the garden. Without so much as worrying her mind as to whether there were any male inmates about or not, she straightway leant on a waiting-maid and hurriedly betook herself into the library, to the intense consternation of the companions, pages and all the men present, who could not manage to clear out of the way in time.

Chia Cheng was on the point of further belabouring his son, when at the sight of Madame Wang walking in, his temper flared up with such increased violence, just as fire on which oil is poured, that the rod fell with greater spite and celerity. The two servant-boys, who held Pao-yü down, precipitately loosened their grip and beat a retreat. Pao-yü had long ago lost all power of movement. Chia Cheng, however, was again preparing to assail him, when the rattan was immediately locked tightly by Madame Wang, in both her arms.

“Of course, of course,” Chia Cheng exclaimed, “what you want to do to-day is to make me succumb to anger!”

“Pao-yü does, I admit, merit to be beaten,” sobbed Madame Wang; “but you should also, my lord, take good care of yourself! The weather, besides, is extremely hot, and our old lady is not feeling quite up to the mark. Were you to knock Pao-yü about and kill him, it would not matter much; but were perchance our venerable senior to suddenly fall ill, wouldn’t it be a grave thing?”

“Better not talk about such things!” observed Chia Cheng with a listless smile. “By my bringing up such a degenerate child of retribution I have myself become unfilial! Whenever I’ve had to call him to account, there has always been a whole crowd of you to screen him; so isn’t it as well for me to avail myself of to-day to put an end to his cur-like existence and thus prevent future misfortune?”

As he spoke, he asked for a rope to strangle him; but Madame Wang lost no time in clasping him in her embrace, and reasoning with him as she wept. “My lord and master,” she said, “it is your duty, of course, to keep your son in proper order, but you should also regard the relationship of husband and wife. I’m already a woman of fifty and I’ve only got this scapegrace. Was there any need for you to give him such a bitter lesson? I wouldn’t presume to use any strong dissuasion; but having, on this occasion, gone so far as to harbour the design of killing him, isn’t this a fixed purpose on your part to cut short my own existence? But as you are bent upon strangling him, be quick and first strangle me before you strangle him! It will be as well that we, mother and son, should

die together, so that if even we go to hell, we may be able to rely upon each other!”

At the conclusion of these words, she enfolded Pao-yü in her embrace and raised her voice in loud sobs.

After listening to her appeal, Chia Cheng could not restrain a deep sigh; and taking a seat on one of the chairs, the tears ran down his cheeks like drops of rain.

But while Madame Wang held Pao-yü in her arms, she noticed that his face was sallow and his breath faint, and that his green gauze nether garments were all speckled with stains of blood, so she could not check her fingers from unloosening his girdle. And realising that from the thighs to the buttocks, his person was here green, there purple, here whole, there broken, and that there was, in fact, not the least bit, which had not sustained some injury, she of a sudden burst out in bitter lamentations for her offspring’s wretched lot in life. But while bemoaning her unfortunate son, she again recalled to mind the memory of Chia Chu, and vehemently calling out “Chia Chu,” she sobbed: “if but you were alive, I would not care if even one hundred died!”

But by this time, the inmates of the inner rooms discovered that Madame Wang had gone out, and Li Kung-ts’ai, Wang Hsi-feng and Ting Ch’un and her sisters promptly rushed out of the garden and came to join her.

While Madame Wang mentioned, with eyes bathed in tears, the name of Chia Chu, every one listened with composure, with the exception of Li Kung-ts’ai, who unable to curb her feelings also raised her voice in sobs. As soon as Chia Cheng heard her plaints, his tears trickled down with greater profusion, like pearls scattered about. But just as there seemed no prospect of their being consoled, a servant-girl was unawares heard to announce: “Our dowager lady has come!” Before this announcement was ended, her tremulous accents reached their ears from outside the window. “If you were to beat me to death and then despatch him,” she cried, “won’t you be clear of us!”

Chia Cheng, upon seeing that his mother was coming, felt distressed and pained. With all promptitude, he went out to meet her. He perceived his old parent, toddling along, leaning on the arm of a servant-girl, wagging her head and gasping for breath.

Chia Cheng drew forward and made a curtsey. “On a hot broiling day like this,” he ventured, forcing a smile, “what made you, mother, get so angry as to rush over in person? Had you anything to enjoin me, you could have sent for me, your son, and given me your orders.”

Old lady Chia, at these words, halted and panted. “Are you really chiding me?” she at the same time said in a stern tone. “It’s I who should call you to task! But as the son, I’ve brought up, isn’t worth a straw, to whom can I go and address a word?”

When Chia Cheng heard language so unlike that generally used by her, he immediately fell on his knees. While doing all in his power to contain his tears: “The reason why,” he explained, “your son corrects his offspring is a desire to reflect lustre on his ancestors and splendour on his seniors; so how can I, your son, deserve the rebuke with which you greet me, mother?”

At this reply, old lady Chia spurted contemptuously. “I made just one remark,” she added, “and you couldn’t stand it, and can Pao-yü likely put up with that death-working cane? You say that your object in correcting your son is to reflect lustre on your ancestors and splendour on your seniors, but in what manner did your father correct you in days gone by?”

Saying this, tears suddenly rolled down from her eyes also.

Chia Cheng forced another smile. “Mother;” he proceeded, “you shouldn’t distress yourself! Your son did it in a sudden fit of rage, but from this time forth I won’t touch him again.”

Dowager lady Chia smiled several loud sneering smiles. “But you shouldn’t get into a huff with me!” she urged. “He’s your son, so if you choose to flog him, you can naturally do so, but I cannot help thinking that you’re sick and tired of me, your mother, of your wife and of your son, so wouldn’t it be as well that we should get out of your way, the sooner the better, as we shall then be able to enjoy peace and quiet?”

So speaking, “Go and look after the chairs.” she speedily cried to a servant. “I and your lady as well as Pao-yü will, without delay, return to Nanking.”

The servant had no help but to assent.

Old lady Chia thereupon called Madame Wang over to her. “You needn’t indulge in sorrow!” she exhorted her. “Pao-yü is now young, and you cherish him fondly; but does it follow that when in years to come he becomes an official, he’ll remember that you are his mother? You mustn’t therefore at present lavish too much of your affection upon him, so that you may by and bye, spare yourself, at least, some displeasure.”

When these exhortations fell on Chia Cheng’s ear, he instantly prostrated himself before her. “Your remarks mother,” he observed, “cut the ground under your son’s very feet.”

“You distinctly act in a way,” cynically smiled old lady Chia, “sufficient to deprive me of any ground to stand upon, and then you, on the contrary, go and speak about yourself! But when we shall have gone back, your mind will be free of all trouble. We’ll see then who’ll interfere and dissuade you from beating people!”

After this reply, she went on to give orders to directly get ready the baggage, carriages, chairs and horses necessary for their return.

Chia Cheng stiffly and rigidly fell on his knees, and knocked his head before her, and pleaded guilty. Dowager lady Chia then addressed him some words, and as she did so, she came to have a look at Pao-yü. Upon perceiving that the thrashing he had got this time was unlike those of past occasions, she experienced both pain and resentment. So clasping him in her arms, she wept and wept incessantly. It was only after Madame Wang, lady Feng and the other ladies had reasoned with her for a time that they at length gradually succeeded in consoling her.

But waiting-maids, married women, and other attendants soon came to support Pao-yü and take him away. Lady Feng however at once expostulated with them. “You stupid things,” she exclaimed, won’t you open your eyes and see! How ever could he be raised and made to walk in the state he’s in! Don’t you yet instantly run inside and fetch some rattan slings and a bench to carry him out of this on?

At this suggestion, the servants rushed hurry-scurry inside and actually brought a bench; and, lifting Pao-yü, they placed him on it. Then following dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the other inmates into the inner part of the building,

they carried him into his grandmother's apartments. But Chia Cheng did not fail to notice that his old mother's passion had not by this time yet abated, so without presuming to consult his own convenience, he too came inside after them. Here he discovered how heavily he had in reality castigated Pao-yü. Upon perceiving Madame Wang also crying, with one breath, "My flesh;" and, with another, saying with tears: "My son, if you had died sooner, instead of Chu Erh, and left Chu Erh behind you, you would have saved your father these fits of anger, and even I would not have had to fruitlessly worry and fret for half of my existence! Were anything to happen now to make you forsake me, upon whom will you have me depend?" And then after heaping reproaches upon herself for a time, break out afresh in lamentations for her, unavailing offspring, Chia Cheng was much cut up and felt conscious that he should not with his own hand have struck his son so ruthlessly as to bring him to this state, and he first and foremost directed his attention to consoling dowager lady Chia.

"If your son isn't good," rejoined the old lady, repressing her tears, "it is naturally for you to exercise control over him. But you shouldn't beat him to such a pitch! Don't you yet bundle yourself away? What are you dallying in here for? Is it likely, pray, that your heart is not yet satisfied, and that you wish to feast your eyes by seeing him die before you go?"

These taunts induced Chia Cheng to eventually withdraw out of the room. By this time, Mrs. Hsüeh together with Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling, Hsi Jen, Shih Hsiang-yün and his other cousins had also congregated in the apartments. Hsi Jen's heart was overflowing with grief; but she could not very well give expression to it. When she saw that a whole company of people shut him in, some pouring water over him, others fanning him; and that she herself could not lend a hand in any way, she availed herself of a favourable moment to make her exit. Proceeding then as far as the second gate, she bade the servant-boys go and fetch Pei-Ming. On his arrival, she submitted him to a searching inquiry. "Why is it," she asked, "that he was beaten just now without the least provocation; and that you didn't run over soon to tell me a word about it?"

"It happened," answered Pei Ming in great perplexity, "that I wasn't present. It was only after he had given him half the flogging that I heard what was going on, and lost no time in ascertaining what it was all about. It's on account of those affairs connected with Ch'i Kuan and that girl Chin Ch'uan."

"How did these things come to master's knowledge?" inquired Hsi Jen.

“As for that affair with Ch’i Kuan,” continued Pei Ming, “it is very likely Mr. Hsüeh P’an who has let it out; for as he has ever been jealous, he may, in the absence of any other way of quenching his resentment, have instigated some one or other outside, who knows, to come and see master and add fuel to his anger. As for Chin Ch’uan-erh’s affair it has presumably been told him by Master Tertius. This I heard from the lips of some person, who was in attendance upon master.”

Hsi Jen saw how much his two versions tallied with the true circumstances, so she readily credited the greater portion of what was told her. Subsequently, she returned inside. Here she found a whole crowd of people trying to do the best to benefit Pao-yü. But after they had completed every arrangement, dowager lady Chia impressed on their minds that it would be better were they to carefully move him into his own quarters. With one voice they all signified their approval, and with a good deal of bustling and fussing, they speedily transferred Pao-yü into the I Hung court, where they stretched him out comfortably on his own bed. Then after some further excitement, the members of the family began gradually to disperse. Hsi Jen at last entered his room, and waited upon him with singleness of heart.

But, reader, if you feel any curiosity to hear what follows, listen to what you will find divulged in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Tai-yü loves Pao-yü with extreme affection; but, on account of this affection, her female cousin gets indignant. Hsüeh P’an commits a grave mistake; but Pao-ch’ai makes this mistake a pretext to tender advice to her brother.

When Hsi Jen saw dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the other members of the family take their leave, our narrative says, she entered the room. and, taking a seat next to Pao-yü, she asked him, while she did all she could to hide her tears: “How was it that he beat you to such extremes?”

Pao-yü heaved a sigh. “It was simply,” he replied, “about those trifles. But what’s the use of your asking me about them? The lower part of my body is so

very sore! Do look and see where I'm bruised!"

At these words, Hsi Jen put out her hand, and inserting it gently under his clothes, she began to pull down the middle garments. She had but slightly moved them, however, when Pao-yü ground his teeth and groaned "ai-ya." Hsi Jen at once stayed her hand. It was after three or four similar attempts that she, at length, succeeded in drawing them down. Then looking closely, Hsi Jen discovered that the upper part of his legs was all green and purple, one mass of scars four fingers wide, and covered with huge blisters.

Hsi Jen gnashed her teeth. "My mother!" she ejaculated, "how is it that he struck you with such a ruthless hand! Had you minded the least bit of my advice to you, things wouldn't have come to such a pass! Luckily, no harm was done to any tendon or bone; for had you been crippled by the thrashing you got, what could we do?"

In the middle of these remarks, she saw the servant-girls come, and they told her that Miss Pao-ch'ai had arrived. Hearing this, Hsi Jen saw well enough that she had no time to put him on his middle garments, so forthwith snatching a double gauze coverlet, she threw it over Pao-yü. This done, she perceived Pao-ch'ai walk in, her hands laden with pills and medicines.

"At night," she said to Hsi Jen, "take these medicines and dissolve them in wine and then apply them on him, and, when the fiery virus from that stagnant blood has been dispelled, he'll be all right again."

After these directions, she handed the medicines to Hsi Jen. "Is he feeling any better now?" she proceeded to inquired.

"Thanks!" rejoined Pao-yü. "I'm feeling better," he at the same time went on to say; after which, he pressed her to take a seat.

Pao-ch'ai noticed that he could open his eyes wide, that he could speak and that he was not as bad as he had been, and she felt considerable inward relief. But nodding her head, she sighed. "If you had long ago listened to the least bit of the advice tendered to you by people things would not have reached this climax to-day," she said. "Not to speak of the pain experienced by our dear ancestor and aunt Wang, the sight of you in this state makes even us feel at heart…."

Just as she had uttered half of the remark she meant to pass, she quickly

suppressed the rest; and smitten by remorse for having spoken too hastily, she could not help getting red in the face and lowering her head.

Pao-yü was realising how affectionate, how friendly and how replete with deep meaning were the sentiments that dropped from her month, when, of a sudden, he saw her seal her lips and, flashing crimson, droop her head, and simply fumble with her girdle. Yet so fascinating was she in those timid blushes, which completely baffle description, that his feelings were roused within him to such a degree, that all sense of pain flew at once beyond the empyrean. “I’ve only had to bear a few blows,” he reflected, “and yet every one of them puts on those pitiful looks sufficient to evoke love and regard; so were, after all, any mishap or untimely end to unexpectedly befall me, who can tell how much more afflicted they won’t be! And as they go on in this way, I shall have them, were I even to die in a moment, to feel so much for me; so there will indeed be no reason for regret, albeit the concerns of a whole lifetime will be thus flung entirely to the winds!”

While indulging in these meditations, ha overheard Pao-ch’ai ask Hsi Jen: “How is it that he got angry, without rhyme or reason, and started beating him?” and Hsi Jen tell her, in reply, the version given to her by Pei Ming.

Pao-yü had, in fact, no idea as yet of what had been said by Chia Huan, and, when he heard Hsi Jen’s disclosures, he eventually got to know what it was; but as it also criminated Hsüeh P’an, he feared lest Pao-ch’ai might feel unhappy, so he lost no time in interrupting Hsi Jen.

“Cousin Hsüeh,” he interposed, “has never been like that; you people mustn’t therefore give way to idle surmises!”

These words were enough to make Pao-ch’ai see that Pao-yü had thought it expedient to say something to stop Hsi Jen’s mouth, apprehending that her suspicions might get roused; and she consequently secretly mused within herself: “He has been beaten to such a pitch, and yet, heedless of his own pains and aches, he’s still so careful not to hurt people’s feelings. But since you can be so considerate, why don’t you take a little more care in greater concerns outside, so that your father should feel a little happier, and that you also should not have to suffer such bitter ordeals! But notwithstanding that the dread of my feeling hurt has prompted you to interrupt Hsi Jen in what she had to tell me, is it likely that I am blind to the fact that my brother has ever followed his fancies, allowed his

passions to run riot, and never done a thing to exercise any check over himself? His temperament is such that he some time back created, all on account of that fellow Ch'in Chung, a rumpus that turned heaven and earth topsy-turvy; and, as a matter of course, he's now far worse than he was ever before!"

"You people," she then observed aloud, at the close of these cogitations, "shouldn't bear this one or that one a grudge. I can't help thinking that it's, after all, because of your usual readiness, cousin Pao-yü, to hobnob with that set that your father recently lost control over his temper. But assuming that my brother did speak in a careless manner and did casually allude to you cousin Pao-yü, it was with no design to instigate any one! In the first place, the remarks he made were really founded on actual facts; and secondly, he's not one to ever trouble himself about such petty trifles as trying to guard against animosities. Ever since your youth up, Miss Hsi, you've simply had before your eyes a person so punctilious as cousin Pao-yü, but have you ever had any experience of one like that brother of mine, who neither fears the powers in heaven or in earth, and who readily blurts out all he thinks?"

Hsi Jen, seeing Pao-yü interrupt her, at the bare mention of Hsüeh P'an, understood at once that she must have spoken recklessly and gave way to misgivings lest Pao-ch'ai might not have been placed in a false position, but when she heard the language used by Pao-ch'ai, she was filled with a keener sense of shame and could not utter a word. Pao-yü too, after listening to the sentiments, which Pao-ch'ai expressed, felt, partly because they were so magnanimous and noble, and partly because they banished all misconception from his mind, his heart and soul throb with greater emotion then ever before. When, however, about to put in his word, he noticed Pao-ch'ai rise to her feet.

"I'll come again to see you tomorrow," she said, "but take good care of yourself! I gave the medicines I brought just now to Hsi Jen; let her rub you with them at night and I feel sure you'll get all right."

With these recommendations, she walked out of the door.

Hsi Jen hastened to catch her up and escorted her beyond the court. "Miss," she remarked, "we've really put you to the trouble of coming. Some other day, when Mr. Secundus is well, I shall come in person to thank you."

"What's there to thank me for?" replied Pao-ch'ai, turning her head round and

smiling. “But mind, you advise him to carefully tend his health, and not to give way to idle thoughts and reckless ideas, and he’ll recover. If there’s anything he fancies to eat or to amuse himself with, come quietly over to me and fetch it for him. There will be no use to disturb either our old lady, or Madame Wang, or any of the others; for in the event of its reaching Mr. Chia Cheng’s ear, nothing may, at the time, come of it; but if by and bye he finds it to be true, we’ll, doubtless, suffer for it!”

While tendering this advice, she went on her way.

Hsi Jen retraced her steps and returned into the room, fostering genuine feelings of gratitude for Pao-ch’ai. But on entering, she espied Pao-yü silently lost in deep thought, and looking as if he were asleep, and yet not quite asleep, so she withdrew into the outer quarters to comb her hair and wash.

Pao-yü meanwhile lay motionless in bed. His buttocks tingled with pain, as if they were pricked with needles, or dug with knives; giving him to boot a fiery sensation just as if fire were eating into them. He tried to change his position a bit, but unable to bear the anguish, he burst into groans. The shades of evening were by this time falling. Perceiving that though Hsi Jen had left his side there remained still two or three waiting-maids in attendance, he said to them, as he could find nothing for them to do just then, “You might as well go and comb your hair and perform your ablutions; come in, when I call you.”

Hearing this, they likewise retired. During this while, Pao-yü fell into a drowsy state. Chiang Yü-han then rose before his vision and told him all about his capture by men from the Chung Shun mansion. Presently, Chin Ch’uan-erh too appeared in his room bathed in tears, and explained to him the circumstances which drove her to leap into the well. But Pao-yü, who was half dreaming and half awake, was not able to give his mind to anything that was told him. Unawares, he became conscious of some one having given him a push; and faintly fell on his ear the plaintive tones of some person in distress. Pao-yü was startled out of his dreams. On opening his eyes, he found it to be no other than Lin Tai-yü. But still fearing that it was only a dream, he promptly raised himself, and drawing near her face he passed her features under a minute scrutiny. Seeing her two eyes so swollen, as to look as big as peaches, and her face glistening all over with tears: “If it is not Tai-yü,” (he thought), “who else can it be?”

Pao-yü meant to continue his scrutiny, but the lower part of his person gave him

such unbearable sharp twitches that finding it a hard task to keep up, he, with a shout of “Ai-yo,” lay himself down again, as he heaved a sigh. “What do you once more come here for?” he asked. “The sun, it is true, has set; but the heat remaining on the ground hasn’t yet gone, so you may, by coming over, get another sunstroke. Of course, I’ve had a thrashing but I don’t feel any pains or aches. If I behave in this fashion, it’s all put on to work upon their credulity, so that they may go and spread the reports outside in such a way as to reach my father’s ear. Really it’s all sham; so you mustn’t treat it as a fact!”

Though Lin Tai-yü was not giving way at the time to any wails or loud sobs, yet the more she indulged in those suppressed plaints of hers, the worse she felt her breath get choked and her throat obstructed; so that when Pao-yü‘s assurances fell on her ear, she could not express a single sentiment, though she treasured thousands in her mind. It was only after a long pause that she at last could observe, with agitated voice: “You must after this turn over a new leaf.”

At these words, Pao-yü heaved a deep sigh. “Compose your mind,” he urged. “Don’t speak to me like this; for I am quite prepared to even lay down my life for all those persons!”

But scarcely had he concluded this remark than some one outside the court was heard to say: “Our lady Secunda has arrived.”

Lin Tai-yü readily concluded that it was lady Feng coming, so springing to her feet at once, “I’m off,” she said; “out by the back-court. I’ll look you up again by and bye.”

“This is indeed strange!” exclaimed Pao-yü as he laid hold of her and tried to detain her. “How is it that you’ve deliberately started living in fear and trembling of her!”

Lin Tai-yü grew impatient and stamped her feet. “Look at my eyes!” she added in an undertone. “Must those people amuse themselves again by poking fun at me?”

After this response, Pao-yü speedily let her go.

Lin Tai-yü with hurried step withdrew behind the bed; and no sooner had she issued into the back-court, than lady Feng made her appearance in the room by the front entrance.

“Are you better?” she asked Pao-yü. “If you fancy anything to eat, mind you send some one over to my place to fetch it for you.”

Thereupon Mrs. Hsüeh also came to pay him a visit. Shortly after, a messenger likewise arrived from old lady Chia (to inquire after him).

When the time came to prepare the lights, Pao-yü had a couple of mouthfuls of soup to eat, but he felt so drowsy and heavy that he fell asleep.

Presently, Chou Jui’s wife, Wu Hsin-teng’s wife and Cheng Hao-shih’s wife, all of whom were old dames who frequently went to and fro, heard that Pao-yü had been flogged and they too hurried into his quarters.

Hsi Jen promptly went out to greet them. “Aunts,” she whispered, smiling, “you’ve come a little too late; Master Secundus is sleeping.” Saying this, she led them into the room on the opposite side, and, pressing then to sit down, she poured them some tea.

After sitting perfectly still for a time, “When Master Secundus awakes” the dames observed, “do send us word!”

Hsi Jen assured them that she would, and escorted them out. Just, however, as she was about to retrace her footsteps, she met an old matron, sent over by Madame Wang, who said to her: “Our mistress wants one of Master Secundus attendants to go and see her.”

Upon hearing this message, Hsi Jen communed with her own thoughts. Then turning round, she whispered to Ch’ing Wen, She Yüeh, Ch’iu Wen, and the other maids: “Our lady wishes to see one of us, so be careful and remain in the room while I go. I’ll be back soon.”

At the close of her injunctions, she and the matron made their exit out of the garden by a short cut, and repaired into the drawing-room.

Madame Wang was seated on the cool couch, waving a banana-leaf fan. When she became conscious of her arrival: “It didn’t matter whom you sent,” she remarked, “any one would have done. But have you left him again? Who’s there to wait on him?”

At this question, Hsi Jen lost no time in forcing a smile. “Master Secundus,” she

replied, “just now fell into a sound sleep. Those four or five girls are all right now, they are well able to attend to their master, so please, Madame, dispel all anxious thoughts! I was afraid that your ladyship might have some orders to give, and that if I sent any of them, they might probably not hear distinctly, and thus occasion delay in what there was to be done.”

“There’s nothing much to tell you,” added Madame Wang. “I only wish to ask how his pains and aches are getting on now?”

“I applied on Mr. Secundus,” answered Hsi Jen, “the medicine, which Miss Pao-ch’ai brought over; and he’s better than he was. He was so sore at one time that he couldn’t lie comfortably; but the deep sleep, in which he is plunged now, is a clear sign of his having improved.”

“Has he had anything to eat?” further inquired Madame Wang.

“Our dowager mistress sent him a bowl of soup,” Hsi Jen continued, “and of this he has had a few mouthfuls. He shouted and shouted that his mouth was parched and fancied a decoction of sour plums, but remembering that sour plums are astringent things, that he had been thrashed only a short time before, and that not having been allowed to groan, he must, of course, have been so hard pressed that fiery virus and heated blood must unavoidably have accumulated in the heart, and that were he to put anything of the kind within his lips, it might be driven into the cardiac regions and give rise to some serious illness; and what then would we do? I therefore reasoned with him for ever so long and at last succeeded in deterring him from touching any. So simply taking that syrup of roses, prepared with sugar, I mixed some with water and he had half a small cup of it. But he drank it with distaste; for, being surfeited with it, he found it neither scented nor sweet.”

“Ai-yah!” ejaculated Madame Wang. “Why didn’t you come earlier and tell me? Some one sent me the other day several bottles of scented water. I meant at one time to have given him some, but as I feared that it would be mere waste, I didn’t let him have any. But since he is so sick and tired of that preparation of roses, that he turns up his nose at it, take those two bottles with you. If you just mix a teaspoonful of it in a cup of water, it will impart to it a very strong perfume.”

So saying, she hastened to tell Ts’ai Yün to fetch the bottles of scented water, which she had received as a present a few days before.

“Let her only bring a couple of them, they’ll be enough!” Hsi Jen chimed in. “If you give us more, it will be a useless waste! If it isn’t enough, I can come and fetch a fresh supply. It will come to the same thing!”

Having listened to all they had to say, Ts’ai Yün left the room. After some considerable time, she, in point of fact, returned with only a couple of bottles, which she delivered to Hsi Jen.

On examination, Hsi Jen saw two small glass bottles, no more than three inches in size, with screwing silver stoppers at the top. On the gosling-yellow labels was written, on one: “Pure extract of *olea fragrans*,” on the other, “Pure extract of roses.”

“What fine things these are!” Hsi Jen smiled. “How many small bottles the like of this can there be?”

“They are of the kind sent to the palace,” rejoined Madame Wang. “Didn’t you notice that gosling-yellow slip? But mind, take good care of them for him; don’t fritter them away!”

Hsi Jen assented. She was about to depart when Madame Wang called her back. “I’ve thought of something,” she said, “that I want to ask you.”

Hsi Jen hastily came back.

Madame Wang made sure that there was no one in the room. “I’ve heard a faint rumour,” she then inquired, “to the effect that Pao-yü got a thrashing on this occasion on account of something or other which Huan-Erh told my husband. Have you perchance heard what it was that he said? If you happen to learn anything about it, do confide in me, and I won’t make any fuss and let people know that it was you who told me.”

“I haven’t heard anything of the kind,” answered Hsi Jen. “It was because Mr. Secundus forcibly detained an actor, and that people came and asked master to restore him to them that he got flogged.”

“It was also for this,” continued Madame Wang as she nodded her head, “but there’s another reason besides.”

“As for the other reason, I honestly haven’t the least idea about it,” explained

Hsi Jen. “But I’ll make bold to-day, and say something in your presence, Madame, about which I don’t know whether I am right or wrong in speaking. According to what’s proper….”

She had only spoken half a sentence, when hastily she closed her mouth again.

“You are at liberty to proceed,” urged Madame Wang.

“If your ladyship will not get angry, I’ll speak out,” remarked Hsi Jen.

“Why should I get angry?” observed Madame Wang. “Proceed!”

“According to what’s proper,” resumed Hsi Jen, “our Mr. Secundus should receive our master’s admonition, for if master doesn’t hold him in check, there’s no saying what he mightn’t do in the future.”

As soon as Madame Wang heard this, she clasped her hands and uttered the invocation, “O-mi-to-fu!” Unable to resist the impulse, she drew near Hsi Jen. “My dear child,” she added, “you have also luckily understood the real state of things. What you told me is in perfect harmony with my own views! Is it likely that I don’t know how to look after a son? In former days, when your elder master, Chu, was alive, how did I succeed in keeping him in order? And can it be that I don’t, after all, now understand how to manage a son? But there’s a why and a wherefore in it. The thought is ever present in my mind now, that I’m already a woman past fifty, that of my children there only remains this single one, that he too is developing a delicate physique, and that, what’s more, our dear senior prizes him as much as she would a jewel, that were he kept under strict control, and anything perchance to happen to him, she might, an old lady as she is, sustain some harm from resentment, and that as the high as well as the low will then have no peace or quiet, won’t things get in a bad way? So I feel prompted to spoil him by over-indulgence. Time and again I reason with him. Sometimes, I talk to him; sometimes, I advise him; sometimes, I cry with him. But though, for the time being, he’s all right, he doesn’t, later on, worry his mind in any way about what I say, until he positively gets into some other mess, when he settles down again. But should any harm befall him, through these floggings, upon whom will I depend by and bye?”

As she spoke, she could not help melting into tears.

At the sight of Madame Wang in this disconsolate mood, Hsi Jen herself

unconsciously grew wounded at heart, and as she wept along with her, “Mr. Secundus,” she ventured, “is your ladyship’s own child, so how could you not love him? Even we, who are mere servants, think it a piece of good fortune when we can wait on him for a time, and all parties can enjoy peace and quiet. But if he begins to behave in this manner, even peace and quiet will be completely out of the question for us. On what day, and at what hour, don’t I advise Mr. Secundus; yet I can’t manage to stir him up by any advice! But it happens that all that crew are ever ready to court his friendship, so it isn’t to be wondered that he is what he is! The truth is that he thinks the advice we give him is not right and proper! As you have to-day, Madame, alluded to this subject, I’ve got something to tell you which has weighed heavy on my mind. I’ve been anxious to come and confide it to your ladyship and to solicit your guidance, but I’ve been in fear and dread lest you should give way to suspicion. For not only would then all my disclosures have been in vain, but I would have deprived myself of even a piece of ground wherein my remains could be laid.”

Madame Wang perceived that her remarks were prompted by some purpose. “My dear child,” she eagerly urged; “go on, speak out! When I recently heard one and all praise you secretly behind your back, I simply fancied that it was because you were careful in your attendance on Pao-yü; or possibly because you got on well with every one; all on account of minor considerations like these; (but I never thought it was on account of your good qualities). As it happens, what you told me just now concerns, in all its bearings, a great principle, and is in perfect accord with my ideas, so speak out freely, if you have aught to say! Only let no one else know anything about it, that is all that is needed.”

“I’ve got nothing more to say,” proceeded Hsi Jen. “My sole idea was to solicit your advice, Madame, as to how to devise a plan to induce Mr. Secundus to move his quarters out of the garden by and bye, as things will get all right then.”

This allusion much alarmed Madame Wang. Speedily taking Hsi Jen’s hand in hers: “Is it likely,” she inquired, “that Pao-yü has been up to any mischief with any one?”

“Don’t be too suspicious!” precipitately replied Hsi Jen. “It wasn’t at anything of the kind that I was hinting. I merely expressed my humble opinion. Mr. Secundus is a young man now, and the young ladies inside are no more children. More than that, Miss Lin and Miss Pao may be two female maternal first cousins of his, but albeit his cousins, there is nevertheless the distinction of male and

female between them; and day and night, as they are together, it isn't always convenient, when they have to rise and when they have to sit; so this cannot help making one give way to misgivings. Were, in fact, any outsider to see what's going on, it would not look like the propriety, which should exist in great families. The proverb appositely says that: 'when there's no trouble, one should make provision for the time of trouble.' How many concerns there are in the world, of which there's no making head or tail, mostly because what persons do without any design is construed by such designing people, as chance to have their notice attracted to it, as having been designedly accomplished, and go on talking and talking till, instead of mending matters, they make them worse! But if precautions be not taken beforehand, something improper will surely happen, for your ladyship is well aware of the temperament Mr. Secundus has shown all along! Besides, his great weakness is to fuss in our midst, so if no caution be exercised, and the slightest mistake be sooner or later committed, there'll be then no question of true or false: for when people are many one says one thing and another, and what is there that the months of that mean lot will shun with any sign of respect? Why, if their hearts be well disposed, they will maintain that he is far superior to Buddha himself. But if their hearts be badly disposed, they will at once knit a tissue of lies to show that he cannot even reach the standard of a beast! Now, if people by and bye speak well of Mr. Secundus, we'll all go on smoothly with our lives. But should he perchance give reason to any one to breathe the slightest disparaging remark, won't his body, needless for us to say, be smashed to pieces, his bones ground to powder, and the blame, which he might incur, be made ten thousand times more serious than it is? These things are all commonplace trifles; but won't Mr. Secundus' name and reputation be subsequently done for for life? Secondly, it's no easy thing for your ladyship to see anything of our master. A proverb also says: 'The perfect man makes provision beforehand;' so wouldn't it be better that we should, this very minute, adopt such steps as will enable us to guard against such things? Your ladyship has much to attend to, and you couldn't, of course, think of these things in a moment. And as for us, it would have been well and good, had they never suggested themselves to our minds; but since they have, we should be the more to blame did we not tell you anything about them, Madame. Of late, I have racked my mind, both day and night on this score; and though I couldn't very well confide to any one, my lamp alone knows everything!"

After listening to these words, Madame Wang felt as if she had been blasted by thunder and struck by lightning; and, as they fitted so appositely with the incident connected with Chin Ch'uan-erh, her heart was more than ever fired

with boundless affection for Hsi Jen. “My dear girl,” she promptly smiled, “it’s you, who are gifted with enough foresight to be able to think of these things so thoroughly. Yet, did I not also think of them? But so busy have I been these several times that they slipped from my memory. What you’ve told me to-day, however, has brought me to my senses! It’s, thanks to you, that the reputation of me, his mother, and of him, my son, is preserved intact! I really never had the faintest idea that you were so excellent! But you had better go now; I know of a way. Yet, just another word. After your remarks to me, I’ll hand him over to your charge; please be careful of him. If you preserve him from harm, it will be tantamount to preserving me from harm, and I shall certainly not be ungrateful to you for it.”

Hsi Jen said several consecutive yes’s, and went on her way. She got back just in time to see Pao-yü awake. Hsi Jen explained all about the scented water; and, so intensely delighted was Pao-yü, that he at once asked that some should be mixed and brought to him to taste. In very deed, he found it unusually fragrant and good. But as his heart was a prey to anxiety on Tai-yü‘s behalf, he was full of longings to despatch some one to look her up. He was, however, afraid of Hsi Jen. Readily therefore he devised a plan to first get Hsi Jen out of the way, by despatching her to Pao-ch’ai’s, to borrow a book. After Hsi Jen’s departure, he forthwith called Ch’ing Wen. “Go,” he said, “over to Miss Lin’s and see what she’s up to. Should she inquire about me, all you need tell her is that I’m all right.”

“What shall I go empty-handed for?” rejoined Ch’ing Wen. “If I were, at least, to give her a message, it would look as if I had gone for something.”

“I have no message that you can give her,” added Pao-yü.

“If it can’t be that,” suggested Ch’ing Wen; “I might either take something over or fetch something. Otherwise, when I get there, what excuse will I be able to find?”

After some cogitation, Pao-yü stretched out his hand and, laying hold of a couple of handkerchiefs, he threw them to Ch’ing Wen. “These will do,” he smiled. “Just tell her that I bade you take them to her.”

“This is strange!” exclaimed Ch’ing Wen. “Will she accept these two half worn-out handkerchiefs! She’ll besides get angry and say that you were making fun of

her."

"Don't worry yourself about that;" laughed Pao-yü. "She will certainly know what I mean."

Ch'ing Wen, at this rejoinder, had no help but to take the handkerchiefs and to go to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, where she discovered Ch'un Hsien in the act of hanging out handkerchiefs on the railings to dry. As soon as she saw her walk in, she vehemently waved her hand. "She's gone to sleep!" she said. Ch'ing Wen, however, entered the room. It was in perfect darkness. There was not even so much as a lantern burning, and Tai-yü was already ensconced in bed. "Who is there?" she shouted.

"It's Ch'ing Wen!" promptly replied Ch'ing Wen.

"What are you up to?" Tai-yü inquired.

"Mr. Secundus," explained Ch'ing Wen, "sends you some handkerchiefs, Miss."

Tai-yü's spirits sunk as soon as she caught her reply. "What can he have sent me handkerchiefs for?" she secretly reasoned within herself. "Who gave him these handkerchiefs?" she then asked aloud. "They must be fine ones, so tell him to keep them and give them to some one else; for I don't need such things at present."

"They're not new," smiled Ch'ing Wen. "They are of an ordinary kind, and old."

Hearing this, Lin Tai-yü felt downcast. But after minutely searching her heart, she at last suddenly grasped his meaning and she hastily observed: "Leave them and go your way."

Ch'ing Wen was compelled to put them down; and turning round, she betook herself back again. But much though she turned things over in her mind during the whole of her way homewards, she did not succeed in solving their import.

When Tai-yü guessed the object of the handkerchief, her very soul unawares flitted from her. "As Pao-yü has gone to such pains," she pondered, "to try and probe this dejection of mine, I have, on one hand, sufficient cause to feel gratified; but as there's no knowing what my dejection will come to in the future there is, on the other, enough to make me sad. Here he abruptly and deliberately

sends me a couple of handkerchiefs; and, were it not that he has divined my inmost feelings, the mere sight of these handkerchiefs would be enough to make me treat the whole thing as ridiculous. The secret exchange of presents between us," she went on to muse, "fills me also with fears; and the thought that those tears, which I am ever so fond of shedding to myself, are of no avail, drives me likewise to blush with shame."

And by dint of musing and reflecting, her heart began, in a moment, to bubble over with such excitement that, much against her will, her thoughts in their superabundance rolled on incessantly. So speedily directing that a lamp should be lighted, she little concerned herself about avoiding suspicion, shunning the use of names, or any other such things, and set to work and rubbed the ink, soaked the pen, and then wrote the following stanzas on the two old handkerchiefs:

Vain in my eyes the tears collect; those tears in vain they flow, Which I in secret shed; they slowly drop; but for whom though? The silk kerchiefs, which he so kindly troubled to give me, How ever could they not with anguish and distress fill me?

The second ran thus:

Like falling pearls or rolling gems, they trickle on the sly. Daily I have no heart for aught; listless all day am I. As on my pillow or sleeves' edge I may not wipe them dry, I let them dot by dot, and drop by drop to run freely.

And the third:

The coloured thread cannot contain the pearls cov'ring my face. Tears were of old at Hsiang Chiang shed, but faint has waxed each trace. Outside my window thousands of bamboos, lo, also grow, But whether they be stained with tears or not, I do not know.

Lin Tai-yü was still bent upon going on writing, but feeling her whole body burn like fire, and her face scalding hot, she advanced towards the cheval-glass, and, raising the embroidered cover, she looked in. She saw at a glance that her cheeks wore so red that they, in very truth, put even the peach blossom to the shade. Yet little did she dream that from this date her illness would assume a more serious phase. Shortly, she threw herself on the bed, and, with the handkerchiefs still grasped in her hand, she was lost in a reverie.

Putting her aside, we will now take up our story with Hsi Jen. She went to pay a visit to Pao-ch'ai, but as it happened, Pao-ch'ai was not in the garden, but had gone to look up her mother. Hsi Jen, however, could not very well come back with empty hands so she waited until the second watch, when Pao-ch'ai eventually returned to her quarters.

Indeed, so correct an estimate of Hsüeh P'an's natural disposition did Pao-ch'ai ever have, that from an early moment she entertained within herself some faint suspicion that it must have been Hsüeh P'an, who had instigated some person or other to come and lodge a complaint against Pao-yü. And when she also unexpectedly heard Hsi Jen's disclosures on the subject, she became more positive in her surmises. The one, who had, in fact, told Hsi Jen was Pei Ming. But Pei Ming too had arrived at the conjecture in his own mind, and could not adduce any definite proof, so that every one treated his statements as founded partly on mere suppositions, and partly on actual facts; but, despite this, they felt quite certain that it was (Hsüeh P'an) who had intrigued.

Hsüeh P'an had always enjoyed this reputation; but on this particular instance the harm was not, actually, his own doing; yet as every one, with one consent, tenaciously affirmed that it was he, it was no easy matter for him, much though he might argue, to clear himself of blame.

Soon after his return, on this day, from a drinking bout out of doors, he came to see his mother; but finding Pao-ch'ai in her rooms, they exchanged a few irrelevant remarks. "I hear," he consequently asked, "that cousin Pao-yü has got into trouble; why is it?"

Mrs. Hsüeh was at the time much distressed on this score. As soon therefore as she caught this question, she gnashed her teeth with rage, and shouted: "You good-for-nothing spiteful fellow! It's all you who are at the bottom of this trouble; and do you still have the face to come and ply me with questions?"

These words made Hsüeh P'an wince. "When did I stir up any trouble?" he quickly asked.

"Do you still go on shamming!" cried Mrs. Hsüeh. "Every one knows full well that it was you, who said those things, and do you yet prevaricate?"

"Were every one," insinuated Hsüeh P'an, "to assert that I had committed murder, would you believe even that?"

“Your very sister is well aware that they were said by you.” Mrs. Hsüeh continued, “and is it likely that she would accuse you falsely, pray?”

“Mother,” promptly interposed Pao-ch’ai, “you shouldn’t be brawling with brother just now! If you wait quietly, we’ll find out the plain and honest truth.” Then turning towards Hsüeh P’an: “Whether it’s you, who said those things or not,” she added, “it’s of no consequence. The whole affair, besides, is a matter of the past, so what need is there for any arguments; they will only be making a mountain of a mole-hill! I have just one word of advice to give you; don’t, from henceforward, be up to so much reckless mischief outside; and concern yourself a little less with other people’s affairs! All you do is day after day to associate with your friends and foolishly gad about! You are a happy-go-lucky sort of creature! If nothing happens well and good; but should by and bye anything turn up, every one will, though it be none of your doing, imagine again that you are at the bottom of it! Not to speak of others, why I myself will be the first to suspect you!”

Hsüeh P’an was naturally openhearted and plain-spoken, and could not brook anything in the way of innuendoes, so, when on the one side, Pao-ch’ai advised him not to foolishly gad about, and his mother, on the other, hinted that he had a foul tongue, and that he was the cause that Pao-yü had been flogged, he at once got so exasperated that he jumped about in an erratic manner and did all in his power, by vowing and swearing, to explain matters. “Who has,” he ejaculated, heaping abuse upon every one, “laid such a tissue of lies to my charge! I’d like to take the teeth of that felon and pull them out! It’s clear as day that they shove me forward as a target; for now that Pao-yü has been flogged they find no means of making a display of their zeal. But, is Pao-yü forsooth the lord of the heavens that because he has had a thrashing from his father, the whole household should be fussing for days? The other time, he behaved improperly, and my uncle gave him two whacks. But our venerable ancestor came, after a time, somehow or other, I don’t know how, to hear about it, and, maintaining that it was all due to Mr. Chia Chen, she called him before her, and gave him a good blowing up. And here to-day, they have gone further, and involved me. They may drag me in as much as they like, I don’t fear a rap! But won’t it be better for me to go into the garden, and take Pao-yü and give him a bit of my mind and kill him? I can then pay the penalty by laying down my life for his, and one and all will enjoy peace and quiet!”

While he clamoured and shouted, he looked about him for the bar of the door,

and, snatching it up, he there and then was running off, to the consternation of Mrs. Hsüeh, who clutched him in her arms. “You murderous child of retribution!” she cried. “Whom would you go and beat? come first and assail me?”

From excitement Hsüeh P’an’s eyes protruded like copper bells. “What are you up to,” he vociferated, “that you won’t let me go where I please, and that you deliberately go on calumniating me? But every day that Pao-yü lives, the longer by that day I have to bear a false charge, so it’s as well that we should both die that things be cleared up?”

Pao-ch’ai too hurriedly rushed forward. “Be patient a bit!” she exhorted him. “Here’s mamma in an awful state of despair. Not to mention that it should be for you to come and pacify her, you contrariwise kick up all this rumpus! Why, saying nothing about her who is your parent, were even a perfect stranger to advise you, it would be meant for your good! But the good counsel she gave you has stirred up your monkey instead.”

“From the way you’re now speaking,” Hsüeh P’an rejoined, “it must be you, who said that it was I; no one else but you!”

“You simply know how to feel displeased with me for speaking,” argued Pao-ch’ai, “but you don’t feel displeased with yourself for that reckless way of yours of looking ahead and not minding what is behind!”

“You now bear me a grudge,” Hsüeh P’an added, “for looking to what is ahead and not to what is behind; but how is it you don’t feel indignant with Pao-yü for stirring up strife and provoking trouble outside? Leaving aside everything else, I’ll merely take that affair of Ch’i Kuan-erh’s, which occurred the other day, and recount it to you as an instance. My friends and I came across this Ch’i Kuan-erh, ten times at least, but never has he made a single intimate remark to me, and how is it that, as soon as he met Pao-yü the other day, he at once produced his sash, and gave it to him, though he did not so much as know what his surname and name were? Now is it likely, forsooth, that this too was something that I started?”

“Do you still refer to this?” exclaimed Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch’ai, out of patience. “Wasn’t it about this that he was beaten? This makes it clear enough that it’s you who gave the thing out.”

“Really, you’re enough to exasperate one to death!” Hsüeh P’an exclaimed. “Had you confined yourselves to saying that I had started the yarn, I wouldn’t have lost my temper; but what irritates me is that such a fuss should be made for a single Pao-yü, as to subvert heaven and earth!”

“Who fusses?” shouted Pao-ch’ai. “You are the first to arm yourself to the teeth and start a row, and then you say that it’s others who are up to mischief!”

Hsüeh P’an, seeing that every remark, made by Pao-ch’ai, contained so much reasonableness that he could with difficulty refute it, and that her words were even harder for him to reply to than were those uttered by his mother, he was consequently bent upon contriving a plan to make use of such language as could silence her and compel her to return to her room, so as to have no one bold enough to interfere with his speaking; but, his temper being up, he was not in a position to weigh his speech. “Dear Sister!” he readily therefore said, “you needn’t be flying into a huff with me! I’ve long ago divined your feelings. Mother told me some time back that for you with that gold trinket, must be selected some suitor provided with a jade one; as such a one will be a suitable match for you. And having treasured this in your mind, and seen that Pao-yü has that rubbishy thing of his, you naturally now seize every occasion to screen him….”

However, before he could finish, Pao-ch’ai trembled with anger, and clinging to Mrs. Hsüeh, she melted into tears. “Mother,” she observed, “have you heard what brother says, what is it all about?”

Hsüeh P’an, at the sight of his sister bathed in tears, became alive to the fact that he had spoken inconsiderately, and, flying into a rage, he walked away to his own quarters and retired to rest. But we can well dispense with any further comment on the subject.

Pao-ch’ai was, at heart, full of vexation and displeasure. She meant to give vent to her feelings in some way, but the fear again of upsetting her mother compelled her to conceal her tears. She therefore took leave of her parent, and went back all alone. On her return to her chamber, she sobbed and sobbed throughout the whole night. The next day, she got out of bed, as soon as it dawned; but feeling even no inclination to comb her chevelure or perform her ablutions, she carelessly adjusted her clothes and came out of the garden to see her mother.

As luck would have it, she encountered Tai-yü standing alone under the shade of the trees, who inquired of her: “Where she was off to?”

“I’m going home,” Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai replied. And as she uttered these words, she kept on her way.

But Tai-yü perceived that she was going off in a disconsolate mood; and, noticing that her eyes betrayed signs of crying, and that her manner was unlike that of other days, she smilingly called out to her from behind: “Sister, you should take care of yourself a bit. Were you even to cry so much as to fill two water jars with tears, you wouldn’t heal the wounds inflicted by the cane.”

But as what reply Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai gave is not yet known to you, reader, lend an ear to the explanation contained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Pai Yü-ch’uan tastes too the lotus-leaf soup. Huang Chin-ying skilfully plaits the plum-blossom-knotted nets.

Pao ch’ai had, our story goes, distinctly heard Lin Tai-yü‘s sneer, but in her eagerness to see her mother and brother, she did not so much as turn her head round, but continued straight on her way.

During this time, Lin Tai-yü halted under the shadow of the trees. Upon casting a glance, in the distance towards the I Hung Yüan, she observed Li Kung-ts’ai, Ying Ch’un, T’an Ch’un, Hsi Ch’un and various inmates wending their steps in a body in the direction of the I Hung court; but after they had gone past, and company after company of them had dispersed, she only failed to see lady Feng come. “How is it,” she cogitated within herself, “that she doesn’t come to see Pao-yü? Even supposing that there was some business to detain her, she should also have put in an appearance, so as to curry favour with our venerable senior and Madame Wang. But if she hasn’t shown herself at this hour of the day, there must certainly be some cause or other.”

While preoccupied with conjectures, she raised her head. At a second glance, she

discerned a crowd of people, as thick as flowers in a bouquet, pursuing their way also into the I Hung court. On looking fixedly, she recognised dowager lady Chia, leaning on lady Feng's arm, followed by Mesdames Hsing and Wang, Mrs. Chou and servant-girls, married women and other domestics. In a body they walked into the court. At the sight of them, Tai-yü unwittingly nodded her head, and reflected on the benefit of having a father and mother; and tears forthwith again bedewed her face. In a while, she beheld Pao-ch'ai, Mrs. Hsüeh and the rest likewise go in.

But at quite an unexpected moment she became aware that Tzu Chüan was approaching her from behind. "Miss," she said, "you had better go and take your medicine! The hot water too has got cold."

"What do you, after all, mean by keeping on pressing me so?" inquired Tai-yü. "Whether I have it or not, what's that to you?"

"Your cough," smiled Tzu Chüan, "has recently got a trifle better, and won't you again take your medicine? This is, it's true, the fifth moon, and the weather is hot, but you should, nevertheless, take good care of yourself a bit! Here you've been at this early hour of the morning standing for ever so long in this damp place; so you should go back and have some rest!"

This single hint recalled Tai-yü to her senses. She at length realised that her legs felt rather tired. After lingering about abstractedly for a long while, she quietly returned into the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, supporting herself on Tzu Chüan. As soon as they stepped inside the entrance of the court, her gaze was attracted by the confused shadows of the bamboos, which covered the ground, and the traces of moss, here thick, there thin, and she could not help recalling to mind those two lines of the passage in the Hsi Hsiang Chi:

"In that lone nook some one saunters about, White dew coldly bespecks the verdant moss."

"Shuang Wen," she consequently secretly communed within herself, as she sighed, "had of course a poor fate; but she nevertheless had a widowed mother and a young brother; but in the unhappy destiny, to which I, Tai-yü, am at present doomed, I have neither a widowed mother nor a young brother."

At this point in her reflections, she was about to melt into another fit of crying, when of a sudden, the parrot under the verandah caught sight of Tai-yü

approaching, and, with a shriek, he jumped down from his perch, and made her start with fright.

“Are you bent upon compassing your own death!” she exclaimed. “You’ve covered my head all over with dust again!”

The parrot flew back to his perch. “Hsüeh Yen,” he kept on shouting, “quick, raise the portiere! Miss is come!”

Tai-yü stopped short and rapped on the frame with her hand. “Have his food and water been replenished?” she asked.

The parrot forthwith heaved a deep sigh, closely resembling, in sound, the groans usually indulged in by Tai-yü, and then went on to recite:

“Here I am fain these flowers to inter, but humankind will laugh me as a fool.”
Who knows who will in years to come commit me to my grave.

As soon as these lines fell on the ear of Tai-yü and Tzu Chüan, they blurted out laughing.

“This is what you were repeating some time back, Miss.” Tzu Chüan laughed, “How did he ever manage to commit it to memory?”

Tai-yü then directed some one to take down the frame and suspend it instead on a hook, outside the circular window, and presently entering her room, she seated herself inside the circular window. She had just done drinking her medicine, when she perceived that the shade cast by the cluster of bamboos, planted outside the window, was reflected so far on the gauze lattice as to fill the room with a faint light, so green and mellow, and to impart a certain coolness to the teapoys and mats. But Tai-yü had no means at hand to dispel her ennui, so from inside the gauze lattice, she instigated the parrot to perform his pranks; and selecting some verses, which had ever found favour with her, she tried to teach them to him.

But without descending to particulars, let us now advert to Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai. On her return home, she found her mother alone combing her hair and having a wash. “Why do you run over at this early hour of the morning?” she speedily inquired when she saw her enter.

“To see,” replied Pao-ch’ai, “whether you were all right or not, mother. Did he come again, I wonder, after I left yesterday and make any more trouble or not?”

As she spoke, she sat by her mother’s side, but unable to curb her tears, she began to weep.

Seeing her sobbing, Mrs. Hsüeh herself could not check her feelings, and she, too, burst out into a fit of crying. “My child,” she simultaneously exhorted her, “don’t feel aggrieved! Wait, and I’ll call that child of wrath to order; for were anything to happen to you, from whom will I have anything to hope?”

Hsüeh P’an was outside and happened to overhear their conversation, so with alacrity he ran over, and facing Pao-ch’ai he made a bow, now to the left and now to the right, observing the while: “My dear sister, forgive me this time. The fact is that I took some wine yesterday; I came back late, as I met a few friends on the way. On my return home, I hadn’t as yet got over the fumes, so I unintentionally talked a lot of nonsense. But I don’t so much as remember anything about all I said. It isn’t worth your while, however, losing your temper over such a thing!”

Pao-ch’ai was, in fact, weeping, as she covered her face, but the moment this language fell on her ear, she could scarcely again refrain from laughing. Forthwith raising her head, she sputtered contemptuously on the ground. “You can well dispense with all this sham!” she exclaimed, “I’m well aware that you so dislike us both, that you’re anxious to devise some way of inducing us to part company with you, so that you may be at liberty.”

Hsüeh P’an, at these words, hastened to smile. “Sister,” he argued, “what makes you say so? once upon a time, you weren’t so suspicious and given to uttering anything so perverse!”

Mrs. Hsüeh hurriedly took up the thread of the conversation. “All you know,” she interposed, “is to find fault with your sister’s remarks as being perverse; but can it be that what you said last night was the proper thing to say? In very truth, you were drunk!”

“There’s no need for you to get angry, mother!” Hsüeh P’an rejoined, “nor for you sister either; for from this day, I shan’t any more make common cause with them nor drink wine or gad about. What do you say to that?”

“That’s equal to an acknowledgment of your failings,” Pao-ch’ai laughed.

“Could you exercise such strength of will,” added Mrs. Hsüeh, “why, the dragon too would lay eggs.”

“If I again go and gad about with them,” Hsüeh P’an replied, “and you, sister,

come to hear of it, you can freely spit in my face and call me a beast and no human being. Do you agree to that? But why should you two be daily worried; and all through me alone? For you, mother, to be angry on my account is anyhow excusable; but for me to keep on worrying you, sister, makes me less then ever worthy of the name of a human being! If now that father is no more, I manage, instead of showing you plenty of filial piety, mamma, and you, sister, plenty of love, to provoke my mother to anger, and annoy my sister, why I can't compare myself to even a four-footed creature!"

While from his mouth issued these words, tears rolled down from his eyes; for he too found it hard to contain them.

Mrs. Hsüeh had not at first been overcome by her feelings; but the moment his utterances reached her ear, she once more began to experience the anguish, which they stirred in her heart.

Pao-ch'ai made an effort to force a smile. "You've already," she said, "been the cause of quite enough trouble, and do you now provoke mother to have another cry?"

Hearing this, Hsüeh P'an promptly checked his tears. As he put on a smiling expression, "When did I," he asked, "make mother cry? But never mind; enough of this! let's drop the matter, and not allude to it any more! Call Hsiang Ling to come and give you a cup of tea, sister!"

"I don't want any tea." Pao-ch'ai answered. "I'll wait until mother has finished washing her hands and then go with her into the garden."

"Let me see your necklet, sister," Hsüeh P'an continued. "I think it requires cleaning."

"It is so yellow and bright," rejoined Pao-ch'ai, "and what's the use of cleaning it again?"

"Sister," proceeded Hsüeh P'an, "you must now add a few more clothes to your wardrobe, so tell me what colour and what design you like best."

"I haven't yet worn out all the clothes I have," Pao-ch'ai explained, "and why should I have more made?"

But, in a little time, Mrs. Hsüeh effected the change in her costume, and hand in hand with Pao-ch'ai, she started on her way to the garden.

Hsüeh P'an thereupon took his departure. During this while, Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch'ai trudged in the direction of the garden to look up Pao-yü. As soon as they reached the interior of the I Hung court, they saw a large concourse of waiting-maids and matrons standing inside as well as outside the antechambers and they readily concluded that old lady Chia and the other ladies were assembled in his rooms. Mrs. Hsüeh and her daughter stepped in. After exchanging salutations with every one present, they noticed that Pao-yü was reclining on the couch and Mrs. Hsüeh inquired of him whether he felt any better.

Pao-yü hastily attempted to bow. "I'm considerably better;" he said. "All I do," he went on, "is to disturb you, aunt, and you, my cousin, but I don't deserve such attentions."

Mrs. Hsüeh lost no time in supporting and laying him down. "Mind you tell me whatever may take your fancy!" she proceeded.

"If I do fancy anything," retorted Pao-yü smilingly, "I shall certainly send to you, aunt, for it."

"What would you like to eat," likewise inquired Madame Wang, "so that I may, on my return, send it round to you?"

"There's nothing that I care for," smiled Pao-yü, "though the soup made for me the other day, with young lotus leaves, and small lotus cores was, I thought, somewhat nice."

"From what I hear, its flavour is nothing very grand," lady Feng chimed in laughingly, from where she stood on one side. "It involves, however, a good deal of trouble to concoct; and here you deliberately go and fancy this very thing."

"Go and get it ready!" cried dowager lady Chia several successive times.

"Venerable ancestor," urged lady Feng with a smile, "don't you bother yourself about it! Let me try and remember who can have put the moulds away!" Then turning her head round, "Go and bid," she enjoined an old matron, "the chief in the cook-house go and apply for them!"

After a considerable lapse of time, the matron returned. “The chief in the cook-house,” she explained, “says that the four sets of moulds for soups have all been handed up.”

Upon hearing this, lady Feng thought again for a while. “Yes, I remember,” she afterwards remarked, “they were handed up, but I can’t recollect to whom they were given. Possibly they’re in the tea-room.”

Thereupon, she also despatched a servant to go and inquire of the keeper of the tea-room about them; but he too had not got them; and it was subsequently the butler, entrusted with the care of the gold and silver articles, who brought them round.

Mrs. Hsüeh was the first to take them and examine them. What, in fact, struck her gaze was a small box, the contents of which were four sets of silver moulds. Each of these was over a foot long, and one square inch (in breadth). On the top, holes were bored of the size of beans. Some resembled chrysanthemums, others plum blossom. Some were in the shape of lotus seed-cases, others like water chestnuts. They numbered in all thirty or forty kinds, and were ingeniously executed.

“In your mansion,” she felt impelled to observe smilingly to old lady Chia and Madame Wang, “everything has been amply provided for! Have you got all these things to prepare a plate of soup with! Hadn’t you told me, and I happened to see them, I wouldn’t have been able to make out what they were intended for!”

Lady Feng did not allow time to any one to put in her word. “Aunt,” she said, “how could you ever have divined that these were used last year for the imperial viands! They thought of a way by which they devised, somehow or other, I can’t tell how, some dough shapes, which borrow a little of the pure fragrance of the new lotus leaves. But as all mainly depends upon the quality of the soup, they’re not, after all, of much use! Yet who often goes in for such soup! It was made once only, and that at the time when the moulds were brought; and how is it that he has come to think of it to-day?” So speaking, she took (the moulds), and handed them to a married woman, to go and issue directions to the people in the cook-house to procure at once several fowls, and to add other ingredients besides and prepare ten bowls of soup.

“What do you want all that lot for?” observed Madame Wang.

“There’s good reason for it,” answered lady Feng. “A dish of this kind isn’t, at ordinary times, very often made, and were, now that brother Pao-yü has alluded to it, only sufficient prepared for him, and none for you, dear senior, you, aunt, and you, Madame Wang, it won’t be quite the thing! So isn’t it better that this opportunity should be availed of to get ready a whole supply so that every one should partake of some, and that even I should, through my reliance on your kind favour, taste this novel kind of relish.”

“You are sharper than a monkey!” Dowager lady Chia laughingly exclaimed in reply to her proposal. “You make use of public money to confer boons upon people.”

This remark evoked general laughter.

“This is a mere bagatelle!” eagerly laughed lady Feng. “Even I can afford to stand you such a small treat!” Then turning her head round, “Tell them in the cook-house,” she said to a married woman, “to please make an extra supply, and that they’ll get the money from me.”

The matron assented and went out of the room.

Pao-ch’ai, who was standing near, thereupon interposed with a smile. “During the few years that have gone by since I’ve come here, I’ve carefully noticed that sister-in-law Secunda, cannot, with all her acumen, outwit our venerable ancestor.”

“My dear child!” forthwith replied old lady Chia at these words. “I’m now quite an old woman, and how can there still remain any wit in me! When I was, long ago, of your manlike cousin Feng’s age, I had far more wits about me than she has! Albeit she now avers that she can’t reach our standard, she’s good enough; and compared with your aunt Wang, why, she’s infinitely superior. Your aunt, poor thing, won’t speak much! She’s like a block of wood; and when with her father and mother-in-law, she won’t show herself off to advantage. But that girl Feng has a sharp tongue, so is it a wonder if people take to her.”

“From what you say,” insinuated Pao-yü with a smile, “those who don’t talk much are not loved.”

“Those who don’t speak much,” resumed dowager lady Chia, “possess the endearing quality of reserve. But among those, with glib tongues, there’s also a

certain despicable lot; thus it's better, in a word, not to have too much to say for one's self."

"Quite so," smiled Pao-yü, "yet though senior sister-in-law Chia Chu doesn't, I must confess, talk much, you, venerable ancestor, treat her just as you do cousin Feng. But if you maintain that those alone, who can talk, are worthy of love, then among all these young ladies, sister Feng and cousin Lin are the only ones good enough to be loved."

"With regard to the young ladies," remarked dowager lady Chia, "it isn't that I have any wish to flatter your aunt Hsüeh in her presence, but it is a positive and incontestable fact that there isn't, beginning from the four girls in our household, a single one able to hold a candle to that girl Pao-ch'ai."

At these words, Mrs. Hsüeh promptly smiled. "Dear venerable senior!" she said, "you're rather partial in your verdict."

"Our dear senior," vehemently put in Madame Wang, also smiling, "has often told me in private how nice your daughter Pao-ch'ai is; so this is no lie."

Pao-yü had tried to lead old lady Chia on, originally with the idea of inducing her to speak highly of Lin Tai-yü, but when unawares she began to eulogise Pao-ch'ai instead the result exceeded all his thoughts and went far beyond his expectations. Forthwith he cast a glance at Pao-chai, and gave her a smile, but Pao-chai at once twisted her head round and went and chatted with Hsi Jen. But of a sudden, some one came to ask them to go and have their meal. Dowager lady Chia rose to her feet, and enjoined Pao-yü to be careful of himself. She then gave a few directions to the waiting-maids, and resting her weight on lady Feng's arm, and pressing Mrs. Hsüeh to go out first, she, and all with her, left the apartment in a body. But still she kept on inquiring whether the soup was ready or not. "If there's anything you might fancy to eat," she also said to Mrs. Hsüeh and the others, "mind you, come and tell me, and I know how to coax that hussey Feng to get it for you as well as me."

"My venerable senior!" rejoined Mrs. Hsüeh, "you do have the happy knack of putting her on her mettle; but though she has often got things ready for you, you've, after all, not eaten very much of them."

"Aunt," smiled lady Feng, "don't make such statements! If our worthy senior hasn't eaten me up it's purely and simply because she dislikes human flesh as

being sour. Did she not look down upon it as sour, why, she would long ago have gobbled me up!”

This joke was scarcely ended, when it so tickled the fancy of old lady Chia and all the inmates that they broke out with one voice in a boisterous fit of laughter. Even Pao-yü, who was inside the room, could not keep quiet.

“Really,” Hsi Jen laughed, “the mouth of our mistress Secunda is enough to terrify people to death!”

Pao-yü put out his arm and pulled Hsi Jen. “You’ve been standing for so long,” he smiled, “that you must be feeling tired.”

Saying this, he dragged her down and made her take a seat next to him.

“Here you’ve again forgotten!” laughingly exclaimed Hsi Jen. “Avail yourself now that Miss Pao-ch’ai is in the court to tell her to kindly bid their Ying Erh come and plait a few girdles with twisted cords.”

“How lucky it is you’ve reminded me?” Pao-yü observed with a smile. And putting, while he spoke, his head out of the window: “Cousin Pao-ch’ai,” he cried, “when you’ve had your repast, do tell Ying Erh to come over. I would like to ask her to plait a few girdles for me. Has she got the time to spare?”

Pao-ch’ai heard him speak; and turning round: “How about no time?” she answered. “I’ll tell her by and bye to come; it will be all right.”

Dowager lady Chia and the others, however, failed to catch distinctly the drift of their talk; and they halted and made inquiries of Pao-ch’ai what it was about. Pao-ch’ai gave them the necessary explanations.

“My dear child,” remarked old lady Chia, “do let her come and twist a few girdles for your cousin! And should you be in need of any one for anything, I have over at my place a whole number of servant-girls doing nothing! Out of them, you are at liberty to send for any you like to wait on you!”

“We’ll send her to plait them!” Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch’ai observed smilingly with one consent. “What can we want her for? she also daily idles her time way and is up to every mischief!”

But chatting the while, they were about to proceed on their way when they unexpectedly caught sight of Hsiang-yün, P'ing Erh, Hsiang Lin and other girls picking balsam flowers near the rocks; who, as soon as they saw the company approaching, advanced to welcome them.

Shortly, they all sallied out of the garden. Madame Wang was worrying lest dowager lady Chia's strength might be exhausted, and she did her utmost to induce her to enter the drawing room and sit down. Old lady Chia herself was feeling her legs quite tired out, so she at once nodded her head and expressed her assent. Madame Wang then directed a waiting-maid to hurriedly precede them, and get ready the seats. But as Mrs. Chao had, about this time, pleaded indisposition, there was only therefore Mrs. Chou, with the matrons and servant-girls at hand, so they had ample to do to raise the portières, to put the back-cushions in their places, and to spread out the rugs.

Dowager lady Chia stepped into the room, leaning on lady Feng's arm. She and Mrs. Hsüeh took their places, with due regard to the distinction between hostess and visitors; and Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Shih Hsiang-yün seated themselves below. Madame Wang then came forward, and presented with her own hands tea to old lady Chia, while Li Kung-ts'ai handed a cup to Mrs. Hsüeh.

"You'd better let those young sisters-in law do the honours," remonstrated old lady Chia, "and sit over there so that we may be able to have a chat."

Madame Wang at length sat on a small bench. "Let our worthy senior's viands," she cried, addressing herself to lady Feng, "be served here. And let a few more things be brought!"

Lady Feng acquiesced without delay, and she told a servant to cross over to their old mistress' quarters and to bid the matrons, employed in that part of the household, promptly go out and summon the waiting-girls. The various waiting-maids arrived with all despatch. Madame Wang directed them to ask their young ladies round. But after a protracted absence on the errand, only two of the girls turned up: T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un. Ying Ch'un, was not, in her state of health, equal to the fatigue, or able to put anything in her mouth, and Lin Tai-yü, superfluous to add, could only safely partake of five out of ten meals, so no one thought anything of their non-appearance. Presently the eatables were brought, and the servants arranged them in their proper places on the table.

Lady Feng took a napkin and wrapped a bundle of chopsticks in it. “Venerable ancestor and you, Mrs. Hsüeh,” she smiled, standing the while below, “there’s no need of any yielding! Just you listen to me and I’ll make things all right.”

“Let’s do as she wills!” old lady Chia remarked to Mrs. Hsüeh laughingly.

Mrs. Hsüeh signified her approval with a smile; so lady Feng placed, in due course, four pairs of chopsticks on the table; the two pairs on the upper end for dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh; those on the two sides for Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai and Shih Hsiang-yün. Madame Wang, Li Kung-ts’ai and a few others, stood together below and watched the attendants serve the viands. Lady Feng first and foremost hastily asked for clean utensils, and drew near the table to select some eatables for Pao-yü. Presently, the soup *à la* lotus leaves arrived. After old lady Chia had well scrutinised it, Madame Wang turned her head, and catching sight of Yü Ch’uan-erh, she immediately commissioned her to take some over to Pao-yü.

“She can’t carry it singlehanded,” demurred lady Feng.

But by a strange coincidence, Ying Erh then walked into the room along with Hsi Erh, and Pao-ch’ai knowing very well that they had already had their meal forthwith said to Ying Erh: “Your Master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, just asked that you should go and twist a few girdles for him; so you two might as well proceed together!”

Ying Erh expressed her readiness and left the apartment, in company with Yü Ch’uan-erh.

“How can you carry it, so very hot as it is, the whole way there?” observed Ying Erh.

“Don’t distress yourself!” rejoined Yü Ch’uan smiling. “I know how to do it.”

Saying this, she directed a matron to come and place the soup, rice and the rest of the eatables in a present box; and bidding her lay hold of it and follow them, the two girls sped on their way with empty hands, and made straight for the entrance of the I Hung court. Here Yü Ch’uan-erh at length took the things herself, and entered the room in company with Ying Erh. The trio, Hsi Jen, She Yüeh and Ch’iu Wen were at the time chatting and laughing with Pao-yü; but the moment they saw their two friends arrive they speedily jumped to their feet.

“How is it,” they exclaimed laughingly, “that you two drop in just the nick of time? Have you come together?”

With these words on their lips, they descended to greet them. Yü Ch’uan took at once a seat on a small stool. Ying Erh, however, did not presume to seat herself; and though Hsi Jen was quick enough in moving a footstool for her, Ying Erh did not still venture to sit down.

Ying Erh’s arrival filled Pao-yü with intense delight. But as soon as he noticed Yü Ch’uan-erh, he recalled to memory her sister Chin Ch’uan-erh, and he felt wounded to the very heart, and overpowered with shame. And, without troubling his mind about Ying Erh, he addressed his remarks to Yü Ch’uan-erh.

Hsi Jen saw very well that Ying Erh failed to attract his attention and she began to fear lest she felt uncomfortable; and when she further realised that Ying Erh herself would not take a seat, she drew her out of the room and repaired with her into the outer apartment, where they had a chat over their tea.

She Yüeh and her companions had, in the meantime, got the bowls and chopsticks ready and came to wait upon (Pao-yü) during his meal. But Pao-yü would not have anything to eat. “Is your mother all right,” he forthwith inquired of Yü Ch’uan-erh.

An angry scowl crept over Yü Ch’uan-erh’s face. She did not even look straight at Pao-yü. And only after a long pause was it that she at last uttered merely the words, “all right,” by way of reply. Pao-yü, therefore, found talking to her of little zest. But after a protracted silence he felt impelled to again force a smile, and to ask: “Who told you to bring these things over to me?”

“The ladies,” answered Yü Chuan-erh.

Pao-yü discerned the mournful expression, which still beclouded her countenance and he readily jumped at the conclusion that it must be entirely occasioned by the fate which had befallen Chin Ch’uan-erh, but when fain to put on a meek and unassuming manner, and endeavour to cheer her, he saw how little he could demean himself in the presence of so many people, and consequently he did his best and discovered the means of getting every one out of the way. Afterwards, straining another smile, he plied her with all sorts of questions.

Yü Ch’uan-erh, it is true, did not at first choose to heed his advances, yet when she observed that Pao-yü did not put on any airs, and, that in spite of all her querulous reproaches, he still continued pleasant and agreeable, she felt disconcerted and her features at last assumed a certain expression of cheerfulness. Pao-yü thereupon smiled. “My dear girl,” he said, as he gave way to entreaties, “bring that soup and let me taste it!”

“I’ve never been in the habit of feeding people,” Yü Ch’uan-erh replied. “You’d better wait till the others return; you can have some then.”

“I don’t want you to feed me,” laughed Pao-yü. “It’s because I can’t move about that I appeal to you. Do let me have it! You’ll then get back early and be able, when you’ve handed over the things, to have your meal. But were I to go on wasting your time, won’t you feel upset from hunger? Should you be lazy to budge, well then, I’ll endure the pain and get down and fetch it myself.”

As he spoke, he tried to alight from bed. He strained every nerve, and raised himself, but unable to stand the exertion, he burst out into groans. At the sight of his anguish, Yü Ch’uan-erh had not the heart to refuse her help. Springing up, “Lie down!” she cried. “In what former existence did you commit such evil that your retribution in the present one is so apparent? Which of my eyes however can brook looking at you going on in that way?”

While taunting him, she again blurted out laughing, and brought the soup over to him.

“My dear girl;” smiled Pao-yü, “if you want to show temper, better do so here! When you see our venerable senior and madame, my mother, you should be a little more even-tempered, for if you still behave like this, you’ll at once get a scolding!”

“Eat away, eat away!” urged Yü Ch’uan-erh. “There’s no need for you to be so sweet-mouthed and honey-tongued with me. I don’t put any faith in such talk!”

So speaking, she pressed Pao-yü until he had two mouthfuls of soup. “It isn’t nice, it isn’t nice!” Pao-yü purposely exclaimed.

“Omi-to-fu!” ejaculated Yü Ch’uan-erh. “If this isn’t nice, what’s nice?”

“There’s no flavour about it at all,” resumed Pao-yü. “If you don’t believe me

taste it, and you'll find out for yourself."

Yü Ch'uan-erh in a tantrum actually put some of it to her lips.

"Well," laughed Pao-yü, "it is nice!"

This exclamation eventually enabled Yü Ch'uan to see what Pao-yü was driving at, for Pao-yü had in fact been trying to beguile her to have a mouthful.

"As, at one moment, you say you don't want any," she forthwith observed, "and now you say it is nice, I won't give you any."

While Pao-yü returned her smiles, he kept on earnestly entreating her to let him have some.

Yü Ch'uan-erh however would still not give him any; and she, at the same time, called to the servants to fetch what there was for him to eat. But the instant the waiting-maid put her foot into the room, servants came quite unexpectedly to deliver a message.

"Two nurses," they said, "have arrived from the household of Mr. Fu, Secundus, to present his compliments. They have now come to see you, Mr. Secundus." As soon as Pao-yü heard this report, he felt sure that they must be nurses sent over from the household of Deputy Sub-Prefect, Fu Shih.

This Fu Shih had originally been a pupil of Chia Cheng, and had, indeed, had to rely entirely upon the reputation enjoyed by the Chia family for the realisation of his wishes. Chia Cheng had, likewise, treated him with such genuine regard, and so unlike any of his other pupils, that he (Fu Shih) ever and anon despatched inmates from his mansion to come and see him so as to keep up friendly relations.

Pao-yü had at all times entertained an aversion for bold-faced men and unsophisticated women, so why did he once more, on this occasion, issue directions that the two matrons should be introduced into his presence? There was, in fact, a reason for his action. It was simply that Pao-yü had come to learn that Fu Shih had a sister, Ch'iu-fang by name, a girl as comely as a magnificent gem, and perfection itself, the report of outside people went, as much in intellect as in beauty. He had, it is true, not yet seen anything of her with his own eyes, but the sentiments, which made him think of her and cherish her, from a

distance, were characterised by such extreme sincerity, that dreading lest he should, by refusing to admit the matrons, reflect discredit upon Fu Ch'iu-fang, he was prompted to lose no time in expressing a wish that they should be ushered in.

This Fu Shih had really risen from the vulgar herd, so seeing that Ch'iu-fang possessed several traits of beauty and exceptional intellectual talents, Fu Shih arrived at the resolution of making his sister the means of joining relationship with the influential family of some honourable clan. And so unwilling was he to promise her lightly to any suitor that things were delayed up to this time. Therefore Fu Ch'iu-fang, though at present past her twentieth birthday, was not as yet engaged. But the various well-to-do families, belonging to honourable clans, looked down, on the other hand, on her poor and mean extraction, holding her in such light esteem, as not to relish the idea of making any offer for her hand. So if Fu Shih cultivated intimate terms with the Chia household, he, needless to add, did so with an interested motive.

The two matrons, deputed on the present errand, completely lacked, as it happened, all knowledge of the world, and the moment they heard that Pao-yü wished to see them, they wended their steps inside. But no sooner had they inquired how he was, and passed a few remarks than Yü Ch'uan-erh, becoming conscious of the arrival of strangers, did not bandy words with Pao-yü, but stood with the plate of soup in her hands, engrossed in listening to the conversation. Pao-yü, again, was absorbed in speaking to the matrons; and, while eating some rice, he stretched out his arm to get at the soup; but both his and her (Yü Ch'uan-erh's) eyes were rivetted on the women, and as he thoughtlessly jerked out his hand with some violence, he struck the bowl and turned it clean over. The soup fell over Pao-yü's hand. But it did not hurt Yü Ch'uan-erh. She sustained, however, such a fright that she gave a start.

"How did this happen!" she smilingly shouted with vehemence to the intense consternation of the waiting-maids, who rushed up and clasped the bowl. But notwithstanding that Pao-yü had scalded his own hand, he was quite unconscious of the accident; so much so, that he assailed Yü Ch'uan-erh with a heap of questions, as to where she had been burnt, and whether it was sore or not.

Yü Ch'uan-erh and every one present were highly amused.

"You yourself," observed Yü Ch'uan-erh, "have been scalded, and do you keep

on asking about myself?”

At these words, Pao-yü became at last aware of the injury he had received. The servants rushed with all promptitude and cleared the mess. But Pao-yü was not inclined to touch any more food. He washed his hands, drank a cup of tea, and then exchanged a few further sentences with the two matrons. But subsequently, the two women said goodbye and quitted the room. Ch’ing Wen and some other girls saw them as far as the bridge, after which, they retraced their steps.

The two matrons perceived, that there was no one about, and while proceeding on their way, they started a conversation.

“It isn’t strange,” smiled the one, “if people say that this Pao-yü of theirs is handsome in appearance, but stupid as far as brains go. Nice enough a thing to look at but not to put to one’s lips; rather idiotic in fact; for he burns his own hand, and then he asks some one else whether she’s sore or not. Now, isn’t this being a regular fool?”

“The last time I came,” the other remarked, also smiling, “I heard that many inmates of his family feel ill-will against him. In real truth he is a fool! For there he drips in the heavy downpour like a water fowl, and instead of running to shelter himself, he reminds other people of the rain, and urges them to get quick out of the wet. Now, tell me, isn’t this ridiculous, eh? Time and again, when no one is present, he cries to himself, then laughs to himself. When he sees a swallow, he instantly talks to it; when he espies a fish, in the river, he forthwith speaks to it. At the sight of stars or the moon, if he doesn’t groan and sigh, he mutters and mutters. Indeed, he hasn’t the least bit of character; so much so, that he even puts up with the temper shown by those low-bred maids. If he takes a fancy to a thing, it’s nice enough even though it be a bit of thread. But as for waste, what does he mind? A thing may be worth a thousand or ten thousand pieces of money, he doesn’t worry his mind in the least about it.”

While they talked, they reached the exterior of the garden, and they betook themselves back to their home; where we will leave them.

As soon as Hsi Jen, for we will return to her, saw the women leave the room, she took Ying Erh by the hand and led her in, and they asked Pao-yü what kind of girdle he wanted made.

“I was just now so bent upon talking,” Pao-yü smiled to Ying Erh, “that I forgot

all about you. I put you to the trouble of coming, not for anything else, but that you should also make me a few nets."

"Nets! To put what in?" Ying Erh inquired.

Pao-yü, at this question, put on a smile. "Don't concern yourself about what they are for!" he replied. "Just make me a few of each kind!"

Ying Erh clapped her hand and laughed. "Could this ever be done!" she cried, "If you want all that lot, why, they couldn't be finished in ten years time."

"My dear girl," smiled Pao-yü, "work at them for me then whenever you are at leisure, and have nothing better to do."

"How could you get through them all in a little time?" Hsi Jen interposed smilingly. "First choose now therefore such as are most urgently needed and make a couple of them."

"What about urgently needed?" Ying-Erh exclaimed, "They are merely used for fans, scented pendants and handkerchiefs."

"Nets for handkerchiefs will do all right." Pao-yü answered.

"What's the colour of your handkerchief?" inquired Ying Erh.

"It's a deep red one." Pao-yü rejoined.

"For a deep red one," continued Ying Erh, "a black net will do very nicely, or one of dark green. Both these agree with the colour."

"What goes well with brown?" Pao-yü asked.

"Peach-red goes well with brown." Ying Erh added.

"That will make them look gaudy!" Pao-yü observed. "Yet with all their plainness, they should be somewhat gaudy."

"Leek-green and willow-yellow are what are most to my taste," Ying Erh pursued.

"Yes, they'll also do!" Pao-yü retorted. "But make one of peach-red too and then

one of leek-green."

"Of what design?" Ying Erh remarked.

"How many kinds of designs are there?" Pao-yü said.

"There are 'the stick of incense,' 'stools upset towards heaven,' 'part of elephant's eyes,' 'squares,' 'chains,' 'plum blossom,' and 'willow leaves." Ying Erh answered.

"What was the kind of design you made for Miss Tertia the other day?" Pao-yü inquired.

"It was the 'plum blossom with piled cores,'" Ying Erh explained in reply.

"Yes, that's nice." Pao-yü rejoined.

As he uttered this remark, Hsi Jen arrived with the cords. But no sooner were they brought than a matron cried, from outside the window: "Girls, your viands are ready!"

"Go and have your meal," urged Pao-yü, "and come back quick after you've had it."

"There are visitors here," Hsi Jen smiled, "and how can I very well go?"

"What makes you say so?" Ying Erh laughed, while adjusting the cords. "It's only right and proper that you should go and have your food at once and then return."

Hearing this, Hsi Jen and her companions went off, leaving behind only two youthful servant-girls to answer the calls.

Pao-yü watched Ying Erh make the nets. But, while keeping his eyes intent on her, he talked at the same time of one thing and then another, and next went on to ask her how far she was in her teens.

Ying Erh continued plaiting. "I'm sixteen," she simultaneously rejoined.

"What was your original surname?" Pao-yü added.

“It was Huang;” answered Ying Erh.

“That’s just the thing,” Pao-yü smiled; “for in real truth there’s the ‘Huang Ying-erh;’ (oriole).”

“My name, at one time, consisted of two characters,” continued Ying Erh. “I was called Chin Ying; but Miss Pao-ch’ai didn’t like it, as it was difficult to pronounce, and only called me Ying Erh; so now I’ve come to be known under that name.”

“One can very well say that cousin Pao-ch’ai is fond of you!” Pao-yü pursued. “By and bye, when she gets married, she’s sure to take you along with her.”

Ying Erh puckered up her lips, and gave a significant smile.

“I’ve often told Hsi Jen,” Pao-yü smiled, “that I can’t help wondering who’ll shortly be the lucky ones to win your mistress and yourself.”

“You aren’t aware,” laughed Ying Erh, “that our young mistress possesses several qualities not to be found in a single person in this world; her face is a second consideration.”

Pao-yü noticed how captivating Ying Erh’s tone of voice was, how complaisant she was, and how simpleton-like unaffected in her language and smiles, and he soon felt the warmest affection for her; and particularly so, when she started the conversation about Pao-ch’ai. “Where do her qualities lie?” he readily inquired. “My dear girl, please tell me!”

“If I tell you,” said Ying Erh, “you must, on no account, let her know anything about it again.”

“This goes without saying,” smiled Pao-yü.

But this answer was still on his lips, when they overheard some one outside remark: “How is it that everything is so quiet?”

Both gazed round to see who possibly it could be. They discovered, strange enough, no one else than Pao-ch’ai herself.

Pao-yü hastily offered her a seat. Pao-ch’ai seated herself, and then wanted to

know what Ying Erh was busy plaiting. Inquiring the while, she approached her and scrutinised what she held in her hands, half of which had by this time been done. “What’s the fun of a thing like this?” she said. “Wouldn’t it be preferable to plait a net, and put the jade in it?”

This allusion suggested the idea to Pao-yü. Speedily clapping his hands, he smiled and exclaimed: “Your idea is splendid, cousin. I’d forgotten all about it! The only thing is what colour will suit it best?”

“It will never do to use mixed colours,” Pao-ch’ai rejoined. “Deep red will, on one hand, clash with the colour; while yellow is not pleasing to the eye; and black, on the other hand, is too sombre. But wait, I’ll try and devise something. Bring that gold cord and use it with the black beaded cord; and if you twist one of each together, and make a net with them, it will look very pretty!”

Upon hearing this, Pao-yü was immeasurably delighted, and time after time he shouted to the servants to fetch the gold cord. But just at that moment Hsi Jen stepped in, with two bowls of eatables. “How very strange this is to-day!” she said to Pao-yü. “Why, a few minutes back, my mistress, your mother, sent some one to bring me two bowls of viands.”

“The supply,” replied Pao-yü smiling, “must have been so plentiful to-day, that they’ve sent some to every one of you.”

“It isn’t that,” continued Hsi Jen, “for they were distinctly given to me by name. What’s more, I wasn’t bidden go and knock my head; so this is indeed remarkable!”

“If they’re given to you,” Pao-yü smiled, “why, you had better go and eat them. What’s there in this to fill you with conjectures?”

“There’s never been anything like this before,” Hsi Jen added, “so, it makes me feel uneasy.”

Pao-ch’ai compressed her lips. “If this,” she laughed; “makes you fell uneasy, there will be by and bye other things to make you far more uneasy.”

Hsi Jen realised that she implied something by her insinuations, as she knew from past experience that Pao-ch’ai was not one given to lightly and contemptuously poking fun at people; and, remembering the notions entertained

by Madame Wang on the last occasion she had seen her, she dropped at once any further allusions to the subject and brought the eatables up to Pao-yü for his inspection. “I shall come and hold the cords,” she observed, “as soon as I’ve rinsed my hands.”

This said, she immediately quitted the apartment. After her meal, she washed her hands and came inside to hold the gold cords for Ying Erh to plait the net with.

By this time, Pao-ch’ai had been called away by a servant, despatched by Hsüeh P’an. But while Pao-yü was watching the net that was being made he caught sight, at a moment least expected, of two servant-girls, who came from the part of Madame Hsing of the other mansion, to bring him a few kinds of fruits, and to inquire whether he was able to walk. “If you can go about,” they told him, “(our mistress) desires you, Mr. Pao-yü, to cross over tomorrow and have a little distraction. Her ladyship really longs to see you.”

“Were I able to walk,” Pao-yü answered with alacrity, “I would feel it my duty to go and pay my respects to your mistress! Anyhow, the pain is better than before, so request your lady to allay her solicitude.”

As he bade them both sit down, he, at the same time, called Ch’iu Wen. “Take,” he said to her, “half of the fruits, just received, to Miss Lin as a present.”

Ch’iu Wen signified her obedience, and was about to start on her errand, when she heard Tai-yü talking in the court, and Pao-yü eagerly shout out: “Request her to walk in at once!”

But should there be any further particulars, which you, reader, might feel disposed to know, peruse the details given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

While Hsi Jen is busy embroidering mandarin ducks, Pao-yü receives, in the Chiang Yün Pavilion, an omen from a dream. Pao-yü apprehends that there is a destiny in affections, when his feelings are aroused to a sense of the situation in the Pear Fragrance court.

Ever since dowager lady Chia's return from Madame Wang's quarters, for we will now take up the string of our narrative, she naturally felt happier in her mind as she saw that Pao-yü improved from day to day; but nervous lest Chia Cheng should again in the future send for him, she lost no time in bidding a servant summon a head-page, a constant attendant upon Chia Cheng, to come to her, and in impressing upon him various orders. "Should," she enjoined him, "anything turn up henceforward connected with meeting guests, entertaining visitors and other such matters, and your master mean to send for Pao-yü, you can dispense with going to deliver the message. Just you tell him that I say that after the severe thrashing he has had, great care must be first taken of him during several months before he can be allowed to walk; and that, secondly, his constellation is unpropitious and that he could not see any outsider, while sacrifices are being offered to the stars; that I won't have him therefore put his foot beyond the second gate before the expiry of the eighth moon."

The head-page listened patiently to her instructions, and, assenting to all she had to say, he took his leave.

Old lady Chia thereupon also sent for nurse Li, Hsi Jen and the other waiting-maids and recommended them to tell Pao-yü about her injunctions so that he might be able to quiet his mind.

Pao-yü had always had a repugnance for entertaining high officials and men in general, and the greatest horror of going in official hat and ceremonial dress, to offer congratulations, or express condolences, to pay calls, return visits, or perform other similar conventionalities, but upon receipt on the present occasion of this message, he became so much the more confirmed in his dislikes that not only did he suspend all intercourse with every single relative and friend, but even went so far as to study more than he had ever done before, his own caprices in the fulfilment of those morning and evening salutations due to the senior members of his family. Day after day he spent in the garden, doing nothing else than loafing about, sitting down here, or reclining there. Of a morning, he would, as soon as it was day, stroll as far as the quarters of dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, to repair back, however, in no time. Yet ever ready was he every day that went by to perform menial services for any of the waiting-maids. He, in fact, wasted away in the most complete *dolce far niente* days as well as months. If perchance Pao-ch'ai or any other girl of the same age as herself found at any time an opportunity to give him advice, he would, instead of taking it in good part, fly into a huff. "A pure and spotless maiden," he would say, "has likewise

gone and deliberately imitated those persons, whose aim is to fish for reputation and to seek praise; that set of government thieves and salaried devils. This result entirely arises from the fact that there have been people in former times, who have uselessly stirred up trouble and purposely fabricated stories with the primary object of enticing the filthy male creatures, who would spring up in future ages, to follow in their steps! And who would have thought it, I have had the misfortune of being born a masculine being! But, even those beautiful girls, in the female apartments, have been so contaminated by this practice that verily they show themselves ungrateful for the virtue of Heaven and Earth, in endowing them with perception, and in rearing them with so much comeliness."

Seeing therefore what an insane mania possessed him, not one of his cousins came forward to tender him one proper word of counsel. Lin Tai-yü was the only one of them, who, from his very infancy, had never once admonished him to strive and make a position and attain fame, so thus it was that he entertained for Tai-yü profound consideration. But enough of minor details.

We will now turn our attention to lady Feng. Soon after the news of Chin Ch'uan-erh's death reached her, she saw that domestics from various branches of the family paid her frequent visits at most unexpected hours, and presented her a lot of things, and that they courted her presence at most unseasonable moments, to pay their compliments and adulate her, and she begun to harbour suspicions, in her own mind, as she little knew what their object could possibly be. On this date, she again noticed that some of them had brought their gifts, so, when evening arrived, and no one was present, she felt compelled to inquire jocosely of P'ing Erh what their aim could be.

"Can't your ladyship fathom even this?" P'ing Erh answered with a sardonic smile. "Why, their daughters must, I fancy, be servant-girls in Madame Wang's apartments! For her ladyship's rooms four elderly girls are at present allotted with a monthly allowance of one tael; the rest simply receiving several hundreds of cash each month; so now that Chin Ch'uan-erh is dead and gone, these people must, of course, be anxious to try their tricks and get this one-tael job!"

Hearing this, lady Feng smiled a significant smile. "That's it. Yes, that's it!" she exclaimed. "You've really suggested the idea to my mind! From all appearances, these people are a most insatiable lot; for they make quite enough in the way of money! And as for any business that requires a little exertion, why they are never ready to bear a share of it! They make use of their girls as so many tools to

shove their own duties upon. Yet one overlooks that. But must they too have designs upon this job? Never mind! These people cannot easily afford to spend upon me the money they do. But they bring this upon their own selves, so I'll keep every bit of thing they send. I've, after all, resolved how to act in the matter!"

Having arrived at this decision, lady Feng purely and simply protracted the delay until all the women had sent her enough to satisfy her, when she at last suited her own convenience and spoke to Madame Wang (on the subject of the vacant post).

Mrs. Hsüeh and her daughter were sitting one day, at noon, in Madame Wang's quarters, together with Lin Tai-yü and the other girls, when lady Feng found an opportunity and broached the topic with Madame Wang. "Ever since," she said, "sister Chin Ch'uan-erh's death, there has been one servant less in your ladyship's service. But you may possibly have set your choice upon some girl; if so, do let me know who it is, so that I may be able to pay her her monthly wages."

This reminder made Madame Wang commune with her own self. "I fancy," she remarked; "that the custom is that there should be four or five of them; but as long as there are enough to wait upon me, I don't mind, so we can really dispense with another."

"What you say is, properly speaking, perfectly correct," smiled lady Feng; "but it's an old established custom. There are still a couple to be found in other people's rooms and won't you, Madame, conform with the rule? Besides, the saving of a tael is a small matter."

After this argument, Madame Wang indulged in further thought. "Never mind," she then observed, "just you bring over this allowance and pay it to me. And there will be no need to supply another girl. I'll hand over this tael to her younger sister, Yü Ch'uan-erh, and finish with it. Her elder sister came to an unpleasant end, after a long term of service with me; so if the younger sister, she leaves behind in my employ, receives a double share, it won't be any too excessive."

Lady Feng expressed her approval and turning round she said smilingly to Yü Ch'uan-erh: "I congratulate you, I congratulate you!"

Yü Ch’uan-erh thereupon crossed over and prostrated herself.

“I just want to ask you,” Madame Wang went on to inquire, “how much Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou are allowed monthly?”

“They have a fixed allowance,” answered lady Feng, “each of them draws two taels. But Mrs. Chao gets two taels for cousin Chia Huan, so hers amounts in all to four taels; besides these, four strings of cash.”

“Are they paid in full month after month?” Madame Wang inquired.

Lady Feng thought the question so very strange that she hastened to exclaim by way of reply: “How are they not paid in full?”

“The other day,” Madame Wang proceeded, “I heard a faint rumour that there was some one, who complained in an aggrieved way that she had got a string short. How and why is this?”

“The monthly allowances of the servant-girls, attached to the secondary wives,” lady Feng hurriedly added with a smile, “amounted originally to a tiao each, but ever since last year, it was decided, by those people outside, that the shares of each of those ladies’ girls should be reduced by half, that is, each to five hundred cash; and, as each lady has a couple of servant-girls, they receive therefore a tiao short. But for this, they can’t bear me a grudge. As far as I’m concerned, I would only be too glad to let them have it; but our people outside will again disallow it; so is it likely that I can authorise any increase, pray? In this matter of payments I merely receive the money, and I’ve nothing to do with how it comes and how it goes. I nevertheless recommended, on two or three occasions, that it would be better if these two shares were again raised to the old amount; but they said that there’s only that much money, so that I can’t very well volunteer any further suggestions! Now that the funds are paid into my hands, I give them to them every month, without any irregularity of even so much as a day. When payments hitherto were effected outside, what month were they not short of money? And did they ever, on any single instance, obtain their pay at the proper time and date?”

Having heard this explanation, Madame Wang kept silent for a while. Next, she proceeded to ask, how many girls there were with dowager lady Chia drawing one tael.

“Eight of them,” rejoined lady Feng, “but there are at present only seven; the other one is Hsi Jen.”

“Quite right,” assented Madame Wang. “But your cousin Pao-yü hasn’t any maid at one tael; for Hsi Jen is still a servant belonging to old lady Chia’s household.”

“Hsi Jen,” lady Feng smiled, “is still our dear ancestor’s servant; she’s only lent to cousin Pao-yü; so that she still receives this tael in her capacity of maid to our worthy senior. Any proposal, therefore, that might now be made, that this tael should, as Hsi Jen is Pao-yü‘s servant, be curtailed, can, on no account, be entertained. Yet, were it suggested that another servant should be added to our senior’s staff, then in this way one could reduce the tael she gets. But if this be not curtailed, it will be necessary to also add a servant in cousin Chia Huan’s rooms, in order that there should be a fair apportionment. In fact, Ch’ing Wen, She Yüeh and the others, numbering seven senior maids, receive each a tiao a month; and Chiao Hui and the rest of the junior maids, eight in all, get each five hundred cash per mensem; and this was recommended by our venerable ancestor herself; so how can any one be angry and feel displeasure?”

“Just listen,” laughed Mrs. Hsüeh, “to that girl Feng’s mouth! It rattles and rattles like a cart laden with walnuts, which has turned topsy-turvy! Yet, her accounts are, from what one can gather, clear enough, and her arguments full of reason.”

“Aunt,” rejoined lady Feng smiling, “was I likely, pray, wrong in what I said?”

“Who ever said you were wrong?” Mrs. Hsüeh smiled. “But were you to talk a little slower, wouldn’t it be a saving of exertion for you?”

Lady Feng was about to laugh, but hastily checking herself, she lent an ear to what Madame Wang might have to tell her.

Madame Wang indulged in thought for a considerable time. Afterwards, facing lady Feng, “You’d better,” she said, “select a waiting-maid tomorrow and send her over to our worthy senior to fill up Hsi Jen’s place. Then, discontinue that allowance, which Hsi Jen draws, and keep out of the sum of twenty taels, allotted to me monthly, two taels and a tiao, and give them to Hsi Jen. So henceforward what Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou will get, Hsi Jen will likewise get, with the only difference that the share granted to Hsi Jen, will be entirely apportioned out of my own allowance. Mind, therefore, there will be no

necessity to touch the public funds!”

Lady Feng acquiesced to each one of her recommendations, and, pushing Mrs. Hsüeh, “Aunt,” she inquired, “have you heard her proposal? What have I all along maintained? Well, my words have actually come out true to-day!”

“This should have been accomplished long ago,” Mrs. Hsüeh answered. “For without, of course, making any allusion to her looks, her way of doing business is liberal; her speech and her relations with people are always prompted by an even temper, while inwardly she has plenty of singleness of heart and eagerness to hold her own. Indeed, such a girl is not easy to come across!”

Madame Wang made every effort to conceal her tears. “How could you people ever rightly estimate Hsi Jen’s qualities?” she observed. “Why, she’s a hundred times better than my own Pao-yü. How fortunate, in reality, Pao-yü is! Well would it be if he could have her wait upon him for the whole length of his life!”

“In that case,” lady Feng suggested, “why, have her face shaved at once, and openly place her in his room as a secondary wife. Won’t this be a good plan?”

“This won’t do!” Madame Wang retorted. “For first and foremost he’s of tender years. In the second place, my husband won’t countenance any such thing! In the third, so long as Pao-yü sees that Hsi Jen is his waiting-maid, he may, in the event of anything occurring from his having been allowed to run wild, listen to any good counsel she might give him. But were she now to be made his secondary wife, Hsi Jen would not venture to tender him any extreme advice, even when it’s necessary to do so. It’s better, therefore, to let things stand as they are for the present, and talk about them again, after the lapse of another two or three years.”

At the close of these arguments, lady Feng could not put in a word, by way of reply, to refute them, so turning round, she left the room. She had no sooner, however, got under the verandah, than she discerned the wives of a number of butlers, waiting for her to report various matters to her. Seeing her issue out of the room, they with one consent smiled. “What has your ladyship had to lay before Madame Wang,” they remarked, “that you’ve been talking away this length of time? Didn’t you find it hot work?”

Lady Feng tucked up her sleeves several times. Then resting her foot on the step of the side door, she laughed and rejoined: “The draft in this passage is so cool,

that I'll stop, and let it play on me a bit before I go on. You people," she proceeded to tell them, "say that I've been talking to her all this while, but Madame Wang conjured up all that has occurred for the last two hundred years and questioned me about it; so could I very well not have anything to say in reply? But from this day forth," she added with a sarcastic smile, "I shall do several mean things, and should even (Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou) go, out of any ill-will, and tell Madame Wang, I won't know what fear is for such stupid, glib-tongued, foul-mouthed creatures as they, who are bound not to see a good end! It isn't for them to indulge in those fanciful dreams of becoming primary wives, for there, will come soon a day when the whole lump sum of their allowance will be cut off! They grumble against us for having now reduced the perquisites of the servant-maids, but they don't consider whether they deserve to have so many as three girls to dance attendance on them!"

While heaping abuse on their heads, she started homewards, and went all alone in search of some domestic to go and deliver a message to old lady Chia.

But without any further reference to her, we will take up the thread of our narrative with Mrs. Hsüeh, and the others along with her. During this interval they finished feasting on melons. After some more gossip, each went her own way; and Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and the rest of the cousins returned into the garden. Pao-ch'ai then asked Tai-yü to repair with her to the O Hsiang Arbour. But Tai-yü said that she was just going to have her bath, so they parted company, and Pao-ch'ai walked back all by herself. On her way, she stepped into the I Hung Yüan, to look up Pao-yü and have a friendly hobnob with him, with the idea of dispelling her mid-day lassitude; but, contrary to her expectations, the moment she put her foot into the court, she did not so much as catch the caw of a crow. Even the two storks stood under the banana trees, plunged in sleep. Pao-ch'ai proceeded along the covered passage and entered the rooms. Here she discovered the servant-girls sleeping soundly on the bed of the outer apartment; some lying one way, some another; so turning round the decorated screen, she wended her steps into Pao-yü's chamber. Pao-yü was asleep in bed. Hsi Jen was seated by his side, busy plying her needle. Next to her, lay a yak tail. Pao-ch'ai advanced up to her. "You're really far too scrupulous," she said smilingly in an undertone. "Are there still flies or mosquitos in here? and why do yet use that fly-flap for, to drive what away?"

Hsi Jen was quite taken by surprise. But hastily raising her head, and realising that it was Pao-ch'ai, she hurriedly put down her needlework. "Miss," she

whispered with a smile, “you came upon me so unawares that you gave me quite a start! You don’t know, Miss, that though there be no flies or mosquitoes there is, no one would believe it, a kind of small insect, which penetrates through the holes of this gauze; it is scarcely to be detected, but when one is asleep, it bites just like ants do!”

“It isn’t to be wondered at,” Pao-ch’ai suggested, “for the back of these rooms adjoins the water; the whole place is also one mass of fragrant flowers, and the interior of this room is, too, full of their aroma. These insects grow mostly in the core of flowers, so no sooner do they scent the smell of any than they at once rush in.”

Saying this, she cast a look on the needlework she (Hsi Jen) held in her hands. It consisted, in fact, of a belt of white silk, lined with red, and embroidered on the upper part with designs representing mandarin ducks, disporting themselves among some lotus. The lotus flowers were red, the leaves green, the ducks of variegated colours.

“Ai-yah!” ejaculated Pao-ch’ai, “what very beautiful work! For whom is this, that it’s worth your while wasting so much labour on it?”

Hsi Jen pouted her lips towards the bed.

“Does a big strapping fellow like this,” Pao-ch’ai laughed, “still wear such things?”

“He would never wear any before,” Hsi Jen smiled, “that’s why such a nice one was specially worked for him, in order that when he was allowed to see it, he should not be able to do otherwise than use it. With the present hot weather, he goes to sleep anyhow, but as he has been coaxed to wear it, it doesn’t matter if even he doesn’t cover himself well at night. You say that I bestow much labour upon this, but you haven’t yet seen the one he has on!”

“It is a lucky thing,” Pao-ch’ai observed, smiling, “that you’re gifted with such patience.”

“I’ve done so much of it to-day,” remarked Hsi Jen, “that my neck is quite sore from bending over it. My dear Miss,” she then urged with a beaming countenance, “do sit here a little. I’ll go out for a turn. I’ll be back shortly.”

With these words, she sallied out of the room.

Pao-ch’ai was intent upon examining the embroidery, so in her absentmindedness, she, with one bend of her body, settled herself on the very same spot, which Hsi Jen had recently occupied. But she found, on second scrutiny, the work so really admirable, that impulsively picking up the needle, she continued it for her. At quite an unforeseen moment—for Lin Tai-yü had met Shih Hsiang-yün and asked her to come along with her and present her congratulations to Hsi Jen—these two girls made their appearance in the court. Finding the whole place plunged in silence, Hsiang-yün turned round and betook herself first into the side-rooms in search of Hsi Jen. Lin Tai-yü, meanwhile, walked up to the window from outside, and peeped in through the gauze frame. At a glance, she espied Pao-yü, clad in a silvery-red coat, lying carelessly on the bed, and Pao-ch’ai, seated by his side, busy at some needlework, with a fly-brush resting by her side.

As soon as Lin Tai-yü became conscious of the situation, she immediately slipped out of sight, and stopping her mouth with one hand, as she did not venture to laugh aloud, she waved her other hand and beckoned to Hsiang-yün. The moment Hsiang-yün saw the way she went on, she concluded that she must have something new to impart to her, and she approached her with all promptitude. At the sight, which opened itself before her eyes, she also felt inclined to laugh. Yet the sudden recollection of the kindness, with which Pao-ch’ai had always dealt towards her, induced her to quickly seal her lips. And knowing well enough that Tai-yü never spared any one with her mouth, she was seized with such fear lest she should jeer at them, that she immediately dragged her past the window. “Come along!” she observed. “Hsi Jen, I remember, said that she would be going at noon to wash some clothes at the pond. I presume she’s there already so let’s go and join her.”

Tai-yü inwardly grasped her meaning, but, after indulging in a couple of sardonic smiles, she had no alternative but to follow in her footsteps.

Pao-ch’ai had, during this while, managed to embroider two or three petals, when she heard Pao-yü begin to shout abusingly in his dreams. “How can,” he cried, “one ever believe what bonzes and Taoist priests say? What about a match between gold and jade? My impression is that it’s to be a union between a shrub and a stone!”

Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai caught every single word uttered by him and fell unconsciously in a state of excitement. Of a sudden, however, Hsi Jen appeared on the scene. “Hasn’t he yet woke up?” she inquired.

Pao-ch’ai nodded her head by way of reply.

“I just came across,” Hsi Jen smiled, “Miss Lin and Miss Shih. Did they happen to come in?”

“I didn’t see them come in,” Pao-ch’ai answered. “Did they tell you anything?” she next smilingly asked of Hsi Jen.

Hsi Jen blushed and laughed significantly. “They simply came out with some of those jokes of theirs,” she explained. “What decent things could such as they have had to tell me?”

“They made insinuations to-day,” Pao-ch’ai laughed, “which are anything but a joke! I was on the point of telling you them, when you rushed away in an awful hurry.”

But no sooner had she concluded, than she perceived a servant, come over from lady Feng’s part to fetch Hsi Jen. “It must be on account of what they hinted,” Pao-ch’ai smilingly added.

Hsi Jen could not therefore do otherwise than arouse two servant-maids and go. She proceeded, with Pao-ch’ai, out of the I Hung court, and then repaired all alone to lady Feng’s on this side. It was indeed to communicate to her what had been decided about her, and to explain to her, as well, that though she could go and prostrate herself before Madame Wang, she could dispense with seeing dowager lady Chia. This news made Hsi Jen feel very awkward; to such an extent, that no sooner had she got through her visit to Madame Wang, than she returned in a hurry to her rooms.

Pao-yü had already awoke. He asked the reason why she had been called away, but Hsi Jen temporised by giving him an evasive answer. And only at night, when every one was quiet, did Hsi Jen at length give him a full account of the whole matter. Pao-yü was delighted beyond measure. “I’ll see now,” he said, with a face beaming with smiles, “whether you’ll go back home or not. On your return, after your last visit to your people, you stated that your brother wished to redeem you, adding that this place was no home for you, and that you didn’t

know what would become of you in the long run. You freely uttered all that language devoid of feeling and reason, and enough too to produce an estrangement between us, in order to frighten me; but I'd like to see who'll henceforward have the audacity to come and ask you to leave!"

Hsi Jen, upon hearing this, smiled a smile full of irony. "You shouldn't say such things!" she replied. "From henceforward I shall be our Madame Wang's servant, so that, if I choose to go I needn't even breathe a word to you. All I'll have to do will be to tell her, and then I shall be free to do as I like."

"But supposing that I behaved improperly," demurred Pao-yü laughingly, "and that you took your leave after letting mother know, you yourself will be placed in no nice fix, when people get wind that you left on account of my having been improper."

"What no nice fix!" smiled Hsi Jen. "Is it likely that I am bound to serve even highway robbers? Well, failing anything else, I can die; for human beings may live a hundred years, but they're bound, in the long run, to fall a victim to death! And when this breath shall have departed, and I shall have lost the sense of hearing and of seeing, all will then be well!"

When her rejoinder fell on his ear, Pao-yü promptly stopped her mouth with both his hands. "Enough! enough! that will do," he shouted. "There's no necessity for you to utter language of this kind."

Hsi Jen was well aware that Pao-yü was gifted with such a peculiar temperament, that he even looked upon flattering or auspicious phrases with utter aversion, treating them as meaningless and consequently insincere, so when, after listening to those truths, she had spoken with such pathos, he, lapsed into another of his melancholy moods, she blamed herself for the want of consideration she had betrayed. Hastily therefore putting on a smile, she tried to hit upon some suitable remarks, with which to interrupt the conversation. Her choice fell upon those licentious and immodest topics, which had ever been a relish to the taste of Pao-yü; and from these the conversation drifted to the subject of womankind. But when, subsequently, reference was made to the excellency of the weak sex, they somehow or other also came to touch upon the mortal nature of women, and Hsi Jen promptly closed her lips in silence.

Noticing however that now that the conversation had reached a point so full of

zest for him, she had nothing to say for herself, Pao-yü smilingly remarked: “What human being is there that can escape death? But the main thing is to come to a proper end! All that those abject male creatures excel in is, the civil officers, to sacrifice their lives by remonstrating with the Emperor; and, the military, to leave their bones on the battlefield. Both these deaths do confer, after life is extinct, the fame of great men upon them; but isn’t it, in fact, better for them not to die? For as it is absolutely necessary that there should be a disorderly Emperor before they can afford any admonition, to what future fate do they thus expose their sovereign, if they rashly throw away their lives, with the sole aim of reaping a fair name for themselves? War too must supervene before they can fight; but if they go and recklessly lay down their lives, with the exclusive idea of gaining the reputation of intrepid warriors, to what destiny will they abandon their country by and bye? Hence it is that neither of these deaths can be looked upon as a legitimate death.”

“Loyal ministers,” Hsi Jen argued, “and excellent generals simply die because it isn’t in their power to do otherwise.”

“Military officers,” Pao-yü explained, “place such entire reliance upon brute force that they become lax in their stratagems and faulty in their plans. It’s because they don’t possess any inherent abilities that they lose their lives. Could one therefore, pray, say that they had no other alternative? Civil officials, on the other hand, can still less compare with military officers. They read a few passages from books, and commit them to memory; and, on the slightest mistake made by the Emperor, they’re at once rash enough to remonstrate with him, prompted by the sole idea of attaining the fame of loyalty and devotion. But, as soon as their stupid notions have bubbled over, they forfeit their lives, and is it likely that it doesn’t lie within their power to do otherwise? Why, they should also bear in mind that the Emperor receives his decrees from Heaven; and, that were he not a perfect man, Heaven itself would, on no account whatever, confer upon him a charge so extremely onerous. This makes it evident therefore that the whole pack and parcel of those officers, who are dead and gone, have invariably fallen victims to their endeavours to attain a high reputation, and that they had no knowledge whatever of the import of the great principle of right! Take me as an instance now. Were really mine the good fortune of departing life at a fit time, I’d avail myself of the present when all you girls are alive, to pass away. And could I get you to shed such profuse tears for me as to swell out into a stream large enough to raise my corpse and carry it to some secluded place, whither no bird even has ever wended its flight, and could I become invisible like the wind,

and nevermore from this time, come into existence as a human being, I shall then have died at a proper season."

Hsi Jen suddenly awoke to the fact that he was beginning to give vent to a lot of twaddle, and speedily, pleading fatigue, she paid no further notice to him. This compelled Pao-yü to at last be quiet and go to sleep. By the morrow, all recollection of the discussion had vanished from his mind.

One day, Pao-yü was feeling weary at heart, after strolling all over the place, when remembering the song of the "Peony Pavilion," he read it over twice to himself; but still his spirits continued anything but joyous. Having heard, however, that among the twelve girls in the Pear Fragrance Court there was one called Ling Kuan, who excelled in singing, he purposely issued forth by a side gate and came in search of her. But the moment he got there, he discovered Pao Kuan, and Yü Kuan in the court. As soon as they caught sight of Pao-yü, they, with one consent, smiled and urged him to take a seat. Pao-yü then inquired where Ling Kuan was. Both girls explained that she was in her room, so Pao-yü hastened in. Here he found Ling Kuan alone, reclining against a pillow. Though perfectly conscious of his arrival, she did not move a muscle. Pao-yü ensconced himself next to her. He had always been in the habit of playing with the rest of the girls, so thinking that Ling Kuan was like the others, he felt impelled to draw near her and to entreat her, with a forced smile, to get up and sing part of the "Niao Ch'ing Ssu." But his hopes were baffled; for as soon as Ling Kuan perceived him sit down, she impetuously raised herself and withdrew from his side. "I'm hoarse," she rejoined with a stern expression on her face. "The Empress the other day called us into the palace; but I couldn't sing even then."

Seeing her sit bolt upright, Pao-yü went on to pass her under a minute survey. He discovered that it was the girl, whom he had, some time ago beheld under the cinnamon roses, drawing the character "Ch'iang." But seeing the reception she accorded him, who had never so far known what it was to be treated contemptuously by any one, he blushed crimson, while muttering some abuse to himself, and felt constrained to quit the room.

Pao Kuan and her companion could not fathom why he was so red and inquired of him the reason. Pao-yü told them. "Wait a while," Pao Kuan said, "until Mr. Ch'iang Secundus comes; and when he asks her to sing, she is bound to sing."

Pao-yü at these words felt very sad within himself. "Where's brother Ch'iang

gone to?" he asked.

"He's just gone out," Pao Kuan answered. "Of course, Ling Kuan must have wanted something or other, and he's gone to devise ways and means to bring it to her."

Pao-yü thought this remark very extraordinary. But after standing about for a while, he actually saw Chia Ch'iang arrive from outside, carrying a cage, with a tiny stage inserted at the top, and a bird as well; and wend his steps, in a gleeful mood, towards the interior to join Ling Kuan. The moment, however, he noticed Pao-yü, he felt under the necessity of halting.

"What kind of bird is that?" Pao-yü asked. "Can it hold a flag in its beak, or do any tricks?"

"It's the 'jade-crested and gold-headed bird,'" smiled Chia Ch'iang.

"How much did you give for it?" Pao-yü continued.

"A tael and eight mace," replied Chia Ch'iang.

But while replying to his inquiries, he motioned to Pao-yü to take a seat, and then went himself into Ling Kuan's apartment.

Pao-yü had, by this time, lost every wish of hearing a song. His sole desire was to find what relations existed between his cousin and Ling Kuan, when he perceived Chia Ch'iang walk in and laughingly say to her, "Come and see this thing."

"What's it?" Ling Kuan asked, rising.

"I've bought a bird for you to amuse yourself with," Chia Ch'iang added, "so that you mayn't daily feel dull and have nothing to distract yourself with. But I'll first play with it and let you see."

With this prelude, he took a few seeds and began to coax the bird, until it, in point of fact, performed various tricks, on the stage, clasping in its beak a mask and a flag.

All the girls shouted out: "How nice;" with the sole exception of Ling Kuan,

who gave a couple of apathetic smirks, and went in a huff to lie down. Again Chia Ch'iang, however, kept on forcing smiles, and inquiring of her whether she liked it or not.

"Isn't it enough," Ling Kuan observed, "that your family entraps a fine lot of human beings like us and coops us up in this hole to study this stuff and nonsense, but do you also now go and get a bird, which likewise is, as it happens, up to this sort of thing? You distinctly fetch it to make fun of us, and mimick us, and do you still ask me whether I like it or not?"

Hearing this reproach, Chia Ch'iang of a sudden sprang to his feet with alacrity and vehemently endeavoured by vowing and swearing to establish his innocence. "How ever could I have been such a fool to-day," he proceeded, "as to go and throw away a tael or two to purchase this bird? I really did it in the hope that it would afford you amusement. I never for a moment entertained such thoughts as those you credit me with. But never mind; I'll let it go, and save you all this misery!"

So saying, he verily gave the bird its liberty; and, with one blow, he smashed the cage to atoms.

"This bird," still argued Ling Kuan, "differs, it's true, from a human being; but it too has a mother and father in its nest, and could you have had the heart to bring it here to perform these silly pranks? In coughing to-day, I expectorated two mouthfuls of blood, and Madame Wang sent some one here to find you so as to tell you to ask the doctor round to minutely diagnose my complaint, and have you instead brought this to mock me with? But it so happens that I, who have not a soul to look after me, or to care for me, also have the fate to fall ill!"

Chia Ch'iang listened to her. "Yesterday evening," he eagerly explained, "I asked the doctor about it. He said that it was nothing at all, that you should take a few doses of medicine, and that he would be coming again in a day or two to see how you were getting on. But who'd have thought it, you have again to-day expectorated blood. I'll go at once and invite him to come round."

Speaking the while, he was about to go immediately when Ling Kuan cried out and stopped him. "Do you go off in a tantrum in this hot broiling sun?" she said. "You may ask him to come, but I won't see him."

When he heard her resolution, Chia Ch'iang had perforce to stand still.

Pao-yü, perceiving what transpired between them, fell unwittingly in a dull reverie. He then at length got an insight into the deep import of the tracing of the character “Ch’iang.” But unable to bear the ordeal any longer, he forthwith took himself out of the way. So absorbed, however, was Chia Ch’iang’s whole mind with Ling Kuan that he could not even give a thought to escorting any one; and it was, in fact, the rest of the singing-girls who saw (Pao-yü) out.

Pao-yü‘s heart was gnawed with doubts and conjectures. In an imbecile frame of mind, he came to the I Hung court. Lin Tai-yü was, at the moment, sitting with Hsi Jen, and chatting with her. As soon as Pao-yü entered his quarters, he addressed himself to Hsi Jen, with a long sigh. “I was very wrong in what I said yesterday evening,” he remarked. “It’s no matter of surprise that father says that I am so narrowminded that I look at things through a tube and measure them with a clam-shell. I mentioned something last night about having nothing but tears, shed by all of you girls, to be buried in. But this was a mere delusion! So as I can’t get the tears of the whole lot of you, each one of you can henceforward keep her own for herself, and have done.”

Hsi Jen had flattered herself that the words he had uttered the previous evening amounted to idle talk, and she had long ago dispelled all thought of them from her mind, but when Pao-yü unawares made further allusion to them, she smilingly rejoined: “You are verily somewhat cracked!”

Pao-yü kept silent, and attempted to make no reply. Yet from this time he fully apprehended that the lot of human affections is, in every instance, subject to predestination, and time and again he was wont to secretly muse, with much anguish: “Who, I wonder, will shed tears for me, at my burial?”

Lin Tai-yü, for we will now allude to her, noticed Pao-yü‘s behaviour, but readily concluding that he must have been, somewhere or other, once more possessed by some malignant spirit, she did not feel it advisable to ask many questions. “I just saw,” she consequently observed, “my maternal aunt, who hearing that tomorrow is Miss Hsüeh’s birthday, bade me come at my convenience to ask you whether you’ll go or not, (and to tell you) to send some one ahead to let them know what you mean to do.”

“I didn’t go the other day, when it was Mr. Chia She’s birthday, so I won’t go now.” Pao-yü answered. “If it is a matter of meeting any one, I won’t go anywhere. On a hot day like this to again don my ceremonial dress! No, I won’t

go. Aunt is not likely to feel displeased with me!”

“What are you driving at?” Hsi Jen speedily ventured. “She couldn’t be put on the same footing as our senior master! She lives close by here. Besides she’s a relative. Why, if you don’t go, won’t you make her imagine things? Well, if you dread the heat, just get up at an early hour and go over and prostrate yourself before her, and come back again, after you’ve had a cup of tea. Won’t this look well?”

Before Pao-yü had time to say anything by way of response, Tai-yü anticipated him. “You should,” she smiled, “go as far as there for the sake of her, who drives the mosquitoes away from you.”

Pao-yü could not make out the drift of her insinuation. “What about driving mosquitoes away?” he vehemently inquired.

Hsi Jen then explained to him how while he was fast asleep the previous day and no one was about to keep him company, Miss Pao-ch’ai had sat with him for a while.

“It shouldn’t have been done!” Pao-yü promptly exclaimed, after hearing her explanations. “But how did I manage to go to sleep and show such utter discourtesy to her? I must go tomorrow!” he then went on to add. But while these words were still on his lips, he unexpectedly caught sight of Shih Hsian-yün walk in in full dress, to bid them adieu, as she said that some one had been sent from her home to fetch her away.

The moment Pao-yü and Tai-yü heard what was the object of her visit, they quickly rose to their feet and pressed her to take a seat. But Shih Hsiang-yün would not sit down, so Pao-yü and Tai-yü were compelled to escort her as far as the front part of the mansion.

Shih Hsiang-yün’s eyes were brimming with tears; but realising that several people from her home were present, she did not have the courage to give full vent to her feelings. But when shortly Pao-ch’ai ran over to find her, she felt so much the more drawn towards them, that she could not brook to part from them. Pao-ch’ai, however, inwardly understood that if her people told her aunt anything on their return, there would again be every fear of her being blown up, as soon as she got back home, and she therefore urged her to start on her way. One and all then walked with her up to the second gate, and Pao-yü wished to

accompany her still further outside, but Shih Hsiang-yün deterred him. Presently, they turned to go back. But once more, she called Pao-yü to her, and whispered to him in a soft tone of voice: “Should our venerable senior not think of me do often allude to me, so that she should depute some one to fetch me.”

Pao-yü time after time assured her that he would comply with her wishes. And having followed her with their eyes, while she got into her curricle and started, they eventually retraced their steps towards the inner compound. But, reader, if you like to follow up the story, peruse the details contained in the chapter below.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In the Study of Autumnal Cheerfulness is accidentally formed the Cydonia Japonica Society. In the Heng Wu Court, the chrysanthemum is, on a certain night, proposed as a subject for verses.

But to continue. After Shih Hsiang-yün’s return home, Pao-yü and the other inmates spent their time, as of old, in rambling about in the garden in search of pleasure, and in humming poetical compositions. But without further reference to their doings, let us take up our narrative with Chia Cheng.

Ever since the visit paid to her home by the imperial consort, he fulfilled his official duties with additional zeal, for the purpose of reverently making requital for the grace shown him by the Emperor. His correct bearing and his spotless reputation did not escape His Majesty’s notice, and he conferred upon him the special appointment of Literary Chancellor, with the sole object of singling out his true merit; for though he had not commenced his career through the arena of public examinations, he belonged nevertheless to a family addicted to letters during successive generations. Chia Cheng had, therefore, on the receipt of the imperial decree, to select the twentieth day of the eighth moon to set out on his journey. When the appointed day came, he worshipped at the shrines of his ancestors, took leave of them and of dowager lady Chia, and started for his post. It would be a needless task, however, to recount with any full particulars how Pao-yü and all the inmates saw him off, how Chia Cheng went to take up his official duties, and what occurred abroad, suffice it for us to notice that Pao-yü, ever since Chia Cheng’s departure, indulged his caprices, allowed his feelings to

run riot, and gadded wildly about. In fact, he wasted his time, and added fruitless days and months to his age.

On this special occasion, he experienced more than ever a sense of his lack of resources, and came to look up his grandmother Chia and Madame Wang. With them, he whiled away some of his time, after which he returned into the garden. As soon as he changed his costume, he perceived Ts'ui Mo enter, with a couple of sheets of fancy notepaper, in her hand, which she delivered to him.

"It quite slipped from my mind," Pao-yü remarked. "I meant to have gone and seen my cousin Tertia; is she better that you come?"

"Miss is all right," Ts'ui Mo answered. "She hasn't even had any medicine to-day. It's only a slight chill."

When Pao-yü heard this reply, he unfolded the fancy notepaper. On perusal, he found the contents to be: "Your cousin, T'an Ch'un, respectfully lays this on her cousin Secundus' study-table. When the other night the blue sky newly opened out to view, the moon shone as if it had been washed clean! Such admiration did this pure and rare panorama evoke in me that I could not reconcile myself to the idea of going to bed. The clepsydra had already accomplished three turns, and yet I roamed by the railing under the dryandra trees. But such poor treatment did I receive from wind and dew (that I caught a chill), which brought about an ailment as severe (as that which prevented the man of old from) picking up sticks. You took the trouble yesterday to come in person and cheer me up. Time after time also did you send your attendants round to make affectionate inquiries about me. You likewise presented me with fresh lichees and relics of writings of Chen Ch'ing. How deep is really your gracious love! As I leant to-day on my table plunged in silence, I suddenly remembered that the ancients of successive ages were placed in circumstances, in which they had to struggle for reputation and to fight for gain, but that they nevertheless acquired spots with hills and dripping streams, and, inviting people to come from far and near, they did all they could to detain them, by throwing the linch-pins of their chariots into wells or by holding on to their shafts; and that they invariably joined friendship with two or three of the same mind as themselves, with whom they strolled about in these grounds, either erecting altars for song, or establishing societies for scanning poetical works. Their meetings were, it is true, prompted, on the spur of the moment, by a sudden fit of good cheer, but these have again and again proved, during many years, a pleasant topic of conversation. I, your cousin, may,

I admit, be devoid of talent, yet I have been fortunate enough to enjoy your company amidst streams and rockeries, and to furthermore admire the elegant verses composed by Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü. When we were in the breezy hall and the moonlit pavilion, what a pity we never talked about poets! But near the almond tree with the sign and the peach tree by the stream, we may perhaps, when under the fumes of wine, be able to fling round the cups, used for humming verses! Who is it who opines that societies with any claim to excellent abilities can only be formed by men? May it not be that the pleasant meetings on the Tung Shan might yield in merit to those, such as ourselves, of the weaker sex? Should you not think it too much to walk on the snow, I shall make bold to ask you round, and sweep the way clean of flowers and wait for you. Respectfully written."

The perusal of this note filled Pao-yü unawares with exultation. Clapping his hands; "My third cousin," he laughed, "is the one eminently polished; I'll go at once to-day and talk matters over with her."

As he spoke, he started immediately, followed by Ts'ui Mo. As soon as they reached the Hsin Fang pavilion, they espied the matron, on duty that day at the back door of the garden, advancing towards them with a note in her hand. The moment she perceived Pao-yü she forthwith came up to meet him. "Mr. Yün," she said, "presents his compliments to you. He is waiting for you at the back gate. This is a note he bade me bring you."

Upon opening the note, Pao-yü found it to read as follows: "An unfilial son, Yün, reverently inquires about his worthy father's boundless happiness and precious health. Remembering the honour conferred upon me by your recognising me, in your heavenly bounty, as your son, I tried both day as well as night to do something in evidence of my pious obedience, but no opportunity could I find to perform anything filial. When I had, some time back, to purchase flowers and plants, I succeeded, thanks to your vast influence, venerable senior, in finally making friends with several gardeners and in seeing a good number of gardens. As the other day I unexpectedly came across a white begonia, of a rare species, I exhausted every possible means to get some and managed to obtain just two pots. If you, worthy senior, regard your son as your own very son, do keep them to feast your eyes upon! But with this hot weather to-day, the young ladies in the garden will, I fear, not be at their ease. I do not consequently presume to come and see you in person, so I present you this letter, written with due respect, while knocking my head before your table. Your son, Yün, on his

knees, lays this epistle at your feet. A joke!”

After reading this note, Pao-yü laughed. “Has he come alone?” he asked. “Or has he any one else with him?”

“He’s got two flower pots as well,” rejoined the matron.

“You go and tell him,” Pao-yü urged, “that I’ve informed myself of the contents of his note, and that there are few who think of me as he does! If you also take the flowers and, put them in my room, it will be all right.”

So saying, he came with Ts’ui Mo into the Ch’iu Shuang study, where he discovered Pao-ch’ai, Tai-yü, Ying Ch’un and Hsi Ch’un already assembled. When they saw him drop in upon them, they all burst out laughing. “Here comes still another!” they exclaimed.

“I’m not a boor,” smiled T’an Ch’un, “so when the idea casually crossed my mind, I wrote a few notes to try and see who would come. But who’d have thought that, as soon as I asked you, you would all come.”

“It’s unfortunately late,” Pao-yü smilingly observed. “We should have started this society long ago.”

“You can’t call this late!” Tai-yü interposed, “so why give way to regret! The only thing is, you must form your society, without including me in the number; for I daren’t be one of you.”

“If you daren’t,” Ying Ch’un smiled, “who can presume to do so?”

“This is,” suggested Pao-yü, “a legitimate and great purpose; and we should all exert our energies. You shouldn’t be modest, and I yielding; but every one of us, who thinks of anything, should freely express it for general discussion. So senior cousin Pao-ch’ai do make some suggestion; and you junior cousin Lin Tai-yü say something.”

“What are you in this hurry for?” Pao-ch’ai exclaimed. “We are not all here yet.”

This remark was barely concluded, when Li Wan also arrived. As soon as she crossed the threshold, “It’s an excellent proposal,” she laughingly cried, “this of starting a poetical society. I recommend myself as controller. Some time ago in

spring, I thought of this, ‘but,’ I mused, ‘I am unable to compose verses, so what’s the use of making a mess of things?’ This is why I dispelled the idea from my mind, and made no mention about it. But since it’s your good pleasure, cousin Tertia, to start it, I’ll help you to set it on foot.”

“As you’ve made up your minds,” Tai-yü put in, “to initiate a poetical society, every one of us will be poets, so we should, as a first step, do away with those various appellations of cousin and uncle and aunt, and thus avoid everything that bears a semblance of vulgarity.”

“First rate,” exclaimed Li Wan, “and why should we not fix upon some new designations by which to address ourselves? This will be a far more refined way! As for my own, I’ve selected that of the ‘Old farmer of Tao Hsiang;’ so let none of you encroach on it.”

“I’ll then call myself the ‘resident-scholar of the Ch’iu Shuang,’ and have done,” T’an Ch’un observed with a smile.

“‘Resident-scholar or master’ is, in fact, not to the point. It’s clumsy, besides,” Pao-yü interposed. “The place here is full of dryandra and banana trees, and if one could possibly hit upon some name bearing upon the dryandra and banana, it would be preferable.”

“I’ve got one,” shouted T’an Ch’un smilingly. “I’ll style myself ‘the guest under the banana trees.’”

“How uncommon!” they unanimously cried. “It’s a nice one!”

“You had better,” laughed Tai-yü, “be quick and drag her away and stew some slices of her flesh, for people to eat with their wine.”

No one grasped her meaning, “Ch’uang-tzu,” Tai-yü proceeded to explain, smiling, “says: ‘The banana leaves shelter the deer,’ and as she styles herself the guest under the banana tree, is she not a deer? So be quick and make pieces of dried venison of her.”

At these words, the whole company laughed.

“Don’t be in a hurry!” T’an Ch’un remarked, as she laughed. “You make use of specious language to abuse people; but I’ve thought of a fine and most apposite

name for you!" Whereupon addressing herself to the party, "In days gone by," she added, "an imperial concubine, Nü Ying, sprinkled her tears on the bamboo, and they became spots, so from olden times to the present spotted bamboos have been known as the 'Hsiang imperial concubine bamboo.' Now she lives in the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, and has a weakness too for tears, so the bamboos over there will by and bye, I presume, likewise become transformed into speckled bamboos; every one therefore must henceforward call her the 'Hsiao Hsiang imperial concubine' and finish with it."

After listening to her, they one and all clapped their hands, and cried out: "Capital!" Lin Tai-yü however drooped her head and did not so much as utter a single word.

"I've also," Li Wan smiled, "devised a suitable name for senior cousin, Hsüeh Pao-chai. It too is one of three characters."

"What's it?" eagerly inquired the party.

"I'll raise her to the rank of 'Princess of Heng Wu,'" Li Wan rejoined. "I wonder what you all think about this."

"This title of honour," T'an Ch'un observed, "is most apposite."

"What about mine?" Pao-yü asked. "You should try and think of one for me also!"

"Your style has long ago been decided upon," Pao-ch'ai smiled. "It consists of three words: 'fussing for nothing!' It's most pat!"

"You should, after all, retain your old name of 'master of the flowers in the purple cave,'" Li Wan suggested. "That will do very well."

"Those were some of the doings of my youth; why rake them up again?" Pao-yü laughed.

"Your styles are very many," T'an Ch'un observed, "and what do you want to choose another for? All you've got to do is to make suitable reply when we call you whatever takes our fancy."

"I must however give you a name," Pao-ch'ai remarked. "There's a very vulgar

name, but it’s just the very thing for you. What is difficult to obtain in the world are riches and honours; what is not easy to combine with them is leisure. These two blessings cannot be enjoyed together, but, as it happens, you hold one along with the other, so that we might as well dub you the ‘rich and honourable idler.’”

“It won’t do; it isn’t suitable,” Pao-yü laughed. “It’s better that you should call me, at random, whatever you like.”

“What names are to be chosen for Miss Secunda and Miss Quarta?” Li Wan inquired.

“We also don’t excel in versifying; what’s the use consequently of giving us names, all for no avail?” Ying Ch’un said.

“In spite of this,” argued T’an Ch’un, “it would be well to likewise find something for you!”

“She lives in the Tzu Ling Chou, (purple caltrop Isle), so let us call her ‘Ling Chou,’” Pao-ch’ai suggested. “As for that girl Quarta, she lives in the On Hsiang Hsieh, (lotus fragrance pavilion); she should thus be called On Hsieh and have done!”

“These will do very well!” Li Wan cried. “But as far as age goes, I am the senior, and you should all defer to my wishes; but I feel certain that when I’ve told you what they are, you will unanimously agree to them. We are seven here to form the society, but neither I, nor Miss Secunda, nor Miss Quarta can write verses; so if you will exclude us three, we’ll each share some special duties.”

“Their names have already been chosen,” T’an Ch’un smilingly demurred; “and do you still keep on addressing them like this? Well, in that case, won’t it be as well for them to have no names? But we must also decide upon some scale of fines, for future guidance, in the event of any mistakes.”

“There will be ample time to fix upon a scale of fines after the society has been definitely established.” Li Wan replied. “There’s plenty of room over in my place so let’s hold our meetings there. I’m not, it is true, a good hand at verses, but if you poets won’t treat me disdainfully as a rustic boor, and if you will allow me to play the hostess, I may certainly also gradually become more and more refined. As for conceding to me the presidentship of the society, it won’t be enough, of course, for me alone to preside; it will be necessary to invite two

others to serve as vice-presidents; you might then enlist Ling Chou and Ou Hsieh, both of whom are cultured persons. The one to choose the themes and assign the metre, the other to act as copyist and supervisor. We three cannot, however, definitely say that we won't write verses, for, if we come across any comparatively easy subject and metre, we too will indite a stanza if we feel so disposed. But you four will positively have to do so. If you agree to this, well, we can proceed with the society; but, if you don't fall in with my wishes, I can't presume to join you."

Ying Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un had a natural aversion for verses. What is more, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü were present. As soon therefore as they heard these proposals, which harmonised so thoroughly with their own views, they both, with one voice, approved them as excellent. T'an Ch'un and the others were likewise well aware of their object, but they could not, when they saw with what willingness they accepted the charge insist, with any propriety, upon their writing verses, and they felt obliged to say yes.

"Your proposals," she consequently said, "may be right enough; but in my views they are ridiculous. For here I've had the trouble of initiating this idea of a society, and, instead of my having anything to say in the matter, I've been the means of making you three come and exercise control over me."

"Well then," Pao-yü suggested, "let's go to the Tao Hsiang village."

"You're always in a hurry!" Li Wan remarked. "We're here to-day to simply deliberate. So wait until I've sent for you again."

"It would be well," Pao-ch'ai interposed, "that we should also decide every how many days we are to meet."

"If we meet too often," argued T'an Ch'un, "there won't be fun in it. We should simply come together two or three times in a month."

"It will be ample if we meet twice or thrice a month," Pao-ch'ai added. "But when the dates have been settled neither wind nor rain should prevent us. Exclusive, however, of these two days, any one in high spirits and disposed to have an extra meeting can either ask us to go over to her place, or you can all come to us; either will do well enough! But won't it be more pleasant if no hard-and-fast dates were laid down?"

“This suggestion is excellent,” they all exclaimed.

“This idea was primarily originated by me,” T’an Ch’un observed, “and I should be the first to play the hostess, so that these good spirits of mine shouldn’t all go for nothing.”

“Well, after this remark,” Li Wan proceeded, “what do you say to your being the first to convene a meeting tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” T’an Ch’un demurred, “is not as good as to-day; the best thing is to have it at once! You’d better therefore choose the subjects, while Ling Chou can fix the metre, and Ou Hsieh act as supervisor.”

“According to my ideas,” Ying Ch’un chimed in, “we shouldn’t yield to the wishes of any single person in the choice of themes and the settlement of the rhythm. What would really be fair and right would be to draw lots.”

“When I came just now,” Li Wan pursued, “I noticed them bring in two pots of white begonias, which were simply beautiful; and why should you not write some verses on them?”

“Can we write verses,” Ying Ch’un retorted, “before we have as yet seen anything of the flowers?”

“They’re purely and simply white begonias,” Pao-chai answered, “and is there again any need to see them before you put together your verses? Men of old merely indited poetical compositions to express their good cheer and conceal their sentiments; had they waited to write on things they had seen, why, the whole number of their works would not be in existence at present!”

“In that case,” Ying Ch’un said, “let me fix the metre.”

With these words, she walked up to the bookcase, and, extracting a volume, she opened it, at random, at some verses which turned out to be a heptameter stanza. Then handing it round for general perusal, everybody had to compose lines with seven words in each. Ying Ch’un next closed the book of verses and addressed herself to a young waiting-maid. “Just utter,” she bade her, “the first character that comes to your mouth.”

The waiting-maid was standing, leaning against the door, so readily she

suggested the word “door.”

“The rhyme then will be the word ‘door,’” Ying Ch’un smiled, “under the thirteenth character ‘Yuan.’ The final word of the first line is therefore ‘door’.”

Saying this, she asked for the box with the rhyme slips, and, pulling out the thirteenth drawer with the character “Yuan,” she directed a young waiting-maid to take four words as they came under her hand. The waiting-maid complied with her directions, and picked out four slips, on which were written “p’en, hun, hen and hun,” pot, spirit, traces and dusk.

“The two characters pot and door,” observed Pao-yü, “are not very easy to rhyme with.”

But Shih Shu then got ready four lots of paper and pens, share and share alike, and one and all quietly set to work, racking their brains to perform their task, with the exception of Tai-yü, who either kept on rubbing the dryandra flowers, or looking at the autumnal weather, or bandying jokes as well with the servant-girls; while Ying Ch’un ordered a waiting-maid to light a “dream-sweet” incense stick.

This “dream-sweet” stick was, it must be explained, made only about three inches long and about the thickness of a lamp-wick, in order to easily burn down. Setting therefore her choice upon one of these as a limit of time, any one who failed to accomplish the allotted task, by the time the stick was consumed, had to pay a penalty.

Presently, T’an Ch’un was the first to think of some verses, and, taking up her pen, she wrote them down; and, after submitting them to several alterations, she handed them up to Ying Ch’un.

“Princess of Heng Wu,” she then inquired of Pao-ch’ai, “have you finished?”

“As for finishing, I have finished,” Pao-ch’ai rejoined; “but they’re worth nothing.”

Pao-yü paced up and down the verandah with his hands behind his back. “Have you heard?” he thereupon said to Tai-yü, “they’ve all done!”

“Don’t concern yourself about me!” Tai-yü returned for answer.

Pao-yü also perceived that Pao-ch'ai had already copied hers out. "Dreadful!" he exclaimed. "There only remains an inch of the stick and I've only just composed four lines. The incense stick is nearly burnt out," he continued, speaking to Tai-yü, "and what do you keep squatting on that damp ground like that for?"

But Tai-yü did not again worry her mind about what he said.

"Well," Pao-yü added, "I can't be looking after you! Whether good or bad, I'll write mine out too and have done."

As he spoke, he likewise drew up to the table and began putting his lines down.

"We'll now peruse the verses," Li Wan interposed, "and if by the time we've done, you haven't as yet handed up your papers, you'll have to be fined."

"Old farmer of Tao Hsiang," Pao-yü remarked, "you're not, it is true, a good hand at writing verses, but you can read well, and, what's more, you're the fairest of the lot; so you'd better adjudge the good and bad, and we'll submit to your judgment."

"Of course!" responded the party with one voice.

In due course, therefore, she first read T'an Ch'un's draft. It ran as follows:—

Verses on the Begonia.

What time the sun's rays slant, and the grass waxeth cold, close the double doors. After a shower of rain, green moss plenteously covers the whole pot. Beauteous is jade, but yet with thee in purity it cannot ever vie. Thy frame, spotless as snow, from admiration easy robs me of my wits Thy fragrant core is like unto a dot, so full of grace, so delicate! When the moon reacheth the third watch, thy comely shade begins to show itself. Do not tell me that a chaste fairy like thee can take wings and pass away. How lovely are thy charms, when in thy company at dusk I sing my lay!

After she had read them aloud, one and all sang their praise for a time. She then took up Pao-ch'ai's, which consisted of:

If thou would'st careful tend those fragrant lovely flowers, close of a day the doors, And with thine own hands take the can and sprinkle water o'er the mossy

pots. Red, as if with cosmetic washed, are the shadows in autumn on the steps. Their crystal snowy bloom invites the dew on their spirits to heap itself. Their extreme whiteness mostly shows that they're more comely than all other flowers. When much they grieve, how can their jadelike form lack the traces of tears? Would'st thou the god of those white flowers repay? then purity need'st thou observe. In silence plunges their fine bloom, now that once more day yields to dusk.

"After all," observed Li Wan, "it's the Princess of Heng Wu, who expresses herself to the point."

Next they bestowed their attention on the following lines, composed by Pao-yü: —

Thy form in autumn faint reflects against the double doors. So heaps the snow in the seventh feast that it filleth thy pots. Thy shade is spotless as Tai Chen, when from her bath she hails. Like Hsi Tzu's, whose hand ever pressed her heart, jadelike thy soul. When the morn-ushering breeze falls not, thy thousand blossoms grieve. To all thy tears the evening shower addeth another trace. Alone thou lean'st against the coloured rails as if with sense imbued. As heavy-hearted as the fond wife, beating clothes, or her that sadly listens to the flute, thou mark'st the fall of dusk.

When they had perused his verses, Pao-yü opined that T'an Ch'un's carried the palm. Li Wan was, however, inclined to concede to the stanza, indited by Pao-ch'ai, the credit of possessing much merit. But she then went on to tell Tai-yü to look sharp.

"Have you all done?" Tai-yü asked.

So saying, she picked up a pen and completing her task, with a few dashes, she threw it to them to look over. On perusal, Li Wan and her companions found her verses to run in this strain:—

Half rolled the speckled portiere hangs, half closed the door. Thy mould like broken ice it looks, jadelike thy pot.

This couplet over, Pao-yü took the initiative and shouted: "Capital." But he had just had time to inquire where she had recalled them to mind from, when they turned their mind to the succeeding lines:

Three points of whiteness from the pear petals thou steal’st; And from the plum bloom its spirit thou borrowest.

“Splendid!” every one (who heard) them conned over, felt impelled to cry. “It is a positive fact,” they said, “that her imagination is, compared with that of others, quite unique.”

But the rest of the composition was next considered. Its text was:

The fairy in Selene’s cavity donneth a plain attire. The maiden, plunged in autumn grief, dries in her room the prints of tears. Winsome she blushes, in silence she’s plunged, with none a word she breathes; But wearily she leans against the eastern breeze, though dusk has long since fall’n.

“This stanza ranks above all!” they unanimously remarked, after it had been read for their benefit.

“As regards beauty of thought and originality, this stanza certainly deserves credit,” Li Wan asserted; “but as regards pregnancy and simplicity of language, it, after all, yields to that of Heng Wu.”

“This criticism is right.” T’an Ch’un put in. “That of the Hsiao Hsiang consort must take second place.”

“Yours, gentleman of I Hung,” Li Wan pursued, “is the last of the lot. Do you agreeably submit to this verdict?”

“My stanza,” Pao-yü ventured, “isn’t really worth a straw. Your criticism is exceedingly fair. But,” he smilingly added, “the two poems, written by Heng Wu and Hsiao Hsiang, have still to be discussed.”

“You should,” argued Li Wan, “fall in with my judgment; this is no business of any of you, so whoever says anything more will have to pay a penalty.”

Pao-yü at this reply found that he had no alternative but to drop the subject.

“I decide that from henceforward,” Li Wan proceeded, “we should hold meetings twice every month, on the second and sixteenth. In the selection of themes and the settlement of the rhymes, you’ll all have then to do as I wish. But any person who may, during the intervals, feel so disposed, will be at perfect liberty to

choose another day for an extra meeting. What will I care if there's a meeting every day of the moon? It will be no concern of mine, so long as when the second and sixteenth arrive, you do, as you're bound to, and come over to my place."

"We should, as is but right," Pao-yü suggested, "choose some name or other for our society."

"Were an ordinary one chosen, it wouldn't be nice," T'an Ch'un explained, "and anything too new-fangled, eccentric or strange won't also be quite the thing! As luck would have it, we've just started with the poems on the begonia, so let us call it the 'Begonia Poetical Society.' This title is, it's true, somewhat commonplace; but as it's positively based on fact, it shouldn't matter."

After this proposal of hers, they held further consultation; and partaking of some slight refreshments, each of them eventually retired. Some repaired to their quarters. Others went to dowager lady Chia's or Madame Wang's apartments. But we will leave them without further comment.

When Hsi Jen, for we will now come to her, perceived Pao-yü peruse the note and walk off in a great flurry, along with Ts'ui Mo, she was quite at a loss what to make of it. Subsequently, she also saw the matrons, on duty at the back gate, bring two pots of begonias. Hsi Jen inquired of them where they came from. The women explained to her all about them. As soon as Hsi Jen heard their reply, she at once desired them to put the flowers in their proper places, and asked them to sit down in the lower rooms. She then entered the house, and, weighing six mace of silver, she wrapped it up properly, and fetching besides three hundred cash, she came over and handed both the amounts to the two matrons. "This silver," she said, "is a present for the boys, who carried the flowers; and these cash are for you to buy yourselves a cup of tea with."

The women rose to their feet in such high glee that their eyebrows dilated and their eyes smiled; but, though they waxed eloquent in the expression of their deep gratitude, they would not accept the money. It was only after they had perceived how obstinate Hsi Jen was in not taking it back that they at last volunteered to keep it.

"Are there," Hsi Jen then inquired, "any servant-boys on duty outside the back gate?"

“There are four of them every day,” answered one of the matrons. “They’re put there with the sole idea of attending to any orders that might be given them from inside. But, Miss, if you’ve anything to order them to do, we’ll go and deliver your message.”

“What orders can I have to give them?” Hsi Jen laughed. “Mr. Pao, our master Secundus, was purposing to send some one to-day to the young marquis’ house to take something over to Miss Shih. But you come at an opportune moment so you might, on your way out, tell the servant-boys at the back gate to hire a carriage; and on its return you can come here and get the money. But don’t let them rush recklessly against people in the front part of the compound!”

The matrons signified their obedience and took their leave. Hsi Jen retraced her steps into the house to fetch a tray in which to place the presents intended for Shih Hsiang-yün, but she discovered the shelf for trays empty. Upon turning round, however, she caught sight of Ch’ing Wen, Ch’iu Wen, She Yüeh and the other girls, seated together, busy with their needlework. “Where is the white cornelian tray with twisted threads gone to?” Hsi Jen asked.

At this question, one looked at the one, and the other stared at the other, but none of them could remember anything about it. After a protracted lapse of time, Ch’ing Wen smiled. “It was taken to Miss Tertia’s with a present of lichees,” she rejoined, “and it hasn’t as yet been returned.”

“There are plenty of articles,” Hsi Jen remarked, “for sending over things on ordinary occasions; and do you deliberately go and carry this off?”

“Didn’t I maintain the same thing?” Ch’ing Wen retorted. “But so well did this tray match with the fresh lichees it contained, that when I took it over, Miss T’an Ch’un herself noticed the fact. ‘How splendid,’ she said, and lo, putting even the tray by, she never had it brought over. But, look! hasn’t the pair of beaded vases, which stood on the very top of that shelf, been fetched as yet?”

“The mention of these vases,” Ch’iu Wen laughed, “reminds me again of a funny incident. Whenever our Mr. Pao-yü‘s filial piety is aroused, he shows himself filial over and above the highest degree! The other day, he espied the olea flowers in the park, and he plucked two twigs. His original idea was to place them in a vase for himself, but a sudden thought struck him. ‘These are flowers,’ he mused, ‘which have newly opened in our garden, so how can I presume to be

the first to enjoy them?' And actually taking down that pair of vases, he filled them with water with his own hands, put the flowers in, and, calling a servant to carry them, he in person took one of the vases into dowager lady Chia's, and then took the other to Madame Wang's. But, as it happens, even his attendants reap some benefit, when once his filial feelings are stirred up! As luck would have it, the one who carried the vases over on that day was myself. The sight of these flowers so enchanted our venerable lady that there was nothing that she wouldn't do. 'Pao-yü,' she said to every one she met, 'is the one, after all, who shows me much attention. So much so, that he has even thought of bringing me a twig of flowers! And yet, the others bear me a grudge on account of the love that I lavish on him!' Our venerable mistress, you all know very well, has never had much to say to me. I have all along not been much of a favourite in the old lady's eyes. But on that occasion she verily directed some one to give me several hundreds of cash. 'I was to be pitied,' she observed, 'for being born with a weak physique!' This was, indeed, an unforeseen piece of good luck! The several hundreds of cash are a mere trifle; but what's not easy to get is this sort of honour! After that, we went over into Madame Wang's. Madame Wang was, at the time, with our lady Secunda, Mrs. Chao, and a whole lot of people; turning the boxes topsy-turvey, trying to find some coloured clothes her ladyship had worn long ago in her youth, so as to give them to some one or other. Who it was, I don't know. But the moment she saw us, she did not even think of searching for any clothes, but got lost in admiration for the flowers. Our lady Secunda was also standing by, and she made sport of the matter. She extolled our master Pao, for his filial piety and for his knowledge of right and wrong; and what with what was true and what wasn't, she came out with two cartloads of compliments. These things spoken in the presence of the whole company so added to Madame Wang's lustre and sealed every one's mouth, that her ladyship was more and more filled with gratification, and she gave me two ready-made clothes as a present. These too are of no consequence; one way or another, we get some every year; but nothing can come up to this sort of lucky chance!"

"Psha!" Ch'ing Wen ejaculated with a significant smile, "you are indeed a mean thing, who has seen nothing of the world! She gave the good ones to others and the refuse to you; and do you still pat on all this side?"

"No matter whether what she gave me was refuse or not," Ch'iu Wen protested, "it's, after all, an act of bounty on the part of her ladyship."

"Had it been myself," Ch'ing Wen pursued, "I would at once have refused them!

It wouldn’t have mattered if she had given me what had been left by some one else; but we all stand on an equal footing in these rooms, and is there any one, forsooth, so much the more exalted or honorable than the other as to justify her taking what is good and bestowing it upon her and giving me what is left? I had rather not take them! I might have had to give offence to Madame Wang, but I wouldn’t have put up with such a slight!”

“To whom did she give any in these rooms?” Ch’iu Wen vehemently inquired. “I was unwell and went home for several days, so that I am not aware to whom any were given. Dear sister, do tell me who it is so that I may know.”

“Were I to tell you,” Ch’ing Wen rejoined, “is it likely that you would return them at this hour to Madame Wang?”

“What nonsense,” Ch’iu Wen laughed. “Ever since I’ve heard about it, I’ve been delighted and happy. No matter if she even bestowed upon me what remained from anything given to a dog in these rooms, I would have been thankful for her ladyship’s kindness. I wouldn’t have worried my mind with anything else!”

After listening to her, everybody laughed. “Doesn’t she know how to jeer in fine style!” they ejaculated unanimously; “for weren’t they given to that foreign spotted pug dog?”

“You lot of filthy-tongued creatures!” Hsi Jen laughed, “when you’ve got nothing to do, you make me the scapegoat to crack your jokes, and poke your fun at! But what kind of death will, I wonder, each of you have!”

“Was it verily you, sister, who got them?” Ch’iu Wen asked with a smile. “I assure you I had no idea about it! I tender you my apologies.”

“You might be a little less domineering!” Hsi Jen remarked smilingly. “The thing now is, who of you will go and fetch the tray.”

“The vases too,” Shih Yüeh suggested, “must be got back when there’s any time to spare; for there’s nothing to say about our venerable mistress’ quarters, but Madame Wang’s apartments teem with people and many hands. The rest are all right; but Mrs. Chao and all that company will, when they see that the vase hails from these rooms, surely again foster evil designs, and they won’t feel happy until they’ve done all they can to spoil it! Besides, Madame Wang doesn’t trouble herself about such things. So had we not as well bring it over a moment

sooner?”

Hearing this, Ch’ing Wen threw down her needlework. “What you say is perfectly right,” she assented, “so you’d better let me go and fetch it.”

“I’ll, after all, go for it.” Ch’iu Wen cried. “You can go and get that tray of yours!”

“You should let me once go for something!” Ch’ing Wen pleaded. “Whenever any lucky chance has turned up, you’ve invariably grabbed it; and can it be that you won’t let me have a single turn?”

“Altogether,” She Yüeh said laughingly, “that girl Ch’iu Wen got a few clothes just once; can such a lucky coincidence present itself again today that you too should find them engaged in searching for clothes?”

“Albeit I mayn’t come across any clothes,” Ch’ing Wen rejoined with a sardonic smile, “our Madame Wang may notice how diligent I am, and apportion me a couple of taels out of her public expenses; there’s no saying.” Continuing, “Don’t you people,” she laughed, “try and play your pranks with me; for is there anything that I don’t twig?”

As she spoke, she ran outside. Ch’iu Wen too left the room in her company; but she repaired to T’an Ch’un’s quarters and fetched the tray.

Hsi Jen then got everything ready. Calling an old nurse attached to the same place as herself, Sung by name, “Just go first and wash, comb your hair and put on your out-of-door clothes,” she said to her, “and then come back as I want to send you at once with a present to Miss Shih.”

“Miss,” urged the nurse Sung, “just give me what you have; and, if you have any message, tell it me; so that when I’ve tidied myself I may go straightway.”

Hsi Jen, at this proposal, brought two small twisted wire boxes; and, opening first the one in which were two kinds of fresh fruits, consisting of caltrops and “chicken head” fruit, and afterwards uncovering the other, containing a tray with new cakes, made of chestnut powder, and steamed in sugar, scented with the olea, “All these fresh fruits are newly plucked this year from our own garden,” she observed; “our Mr. Secundus sends them to Miss Shih to taste. The other day, too, she was quite taken with this cornelian tray so let her keep it for her

use. In this silk bag she'll find the work, which she asked me some time ago to do for her. (Tell her) that she mustn't despise it for its coarseness, but make the best of it and turn it to some account. Present respects to her from our part and inquire after her health on behalf of Mr. Pao-yü; that will be all there's to say."

"Has Mr. Pao, I wonder, anything more for me to tell her?" the nurse Sung added, "Miss, do go and inquire, so that on my return, he mayn't again say that I forgot."

"He was just now," Hsi Jen consequently asked Ch'iu Wen, "over there in Miss Tertia's rooms, wasn't he?"

"They were all assembled there, deliberating about starting some poetical society or other," Ch'iu Wen explained, "and they all wrote verses too. But I fancy he's got no message to give you; so you might as well start."

After this assurance, nurse Sung forthwith took the things, and quitted the apartment. When she had changed her clothes and arranged her hair, Hsi Jen further enjoined them to go by the back door, where there was a servant-boy, waiting with a curricle. Nurse Sung thereupon set out on her errand. But we will leave her for the present.

In a little time Pao-yü came back. After first cursorily glancing at the begonias for a time, he walked into his rooms, and explained to Hsi Jen all about the poetical society they had managed to establish, Hsi Jen then told him that she had sent the nurse Sung along with some things, to Shih Hsiang-yün. As soon as Pao-yü heard this, he clapped his hands. "I forgot all about her!" he cried. "I knew very well that I had something to attend to; but I couldn't remember what it was! Luckily, you've alluded to her! I was just meaning to ask her to come, for what fun will there be in this poetical society without her?"

"Is this of any serious import?" Hsi Jen reasoned with him. "It's all, for the mere sake of recreation! She's not however able to go about at her own free will as you people do. Nor can she at home have her own way. When you therefore let her know, it won't again rest with her, however willing she may be to avail herself of your invitation. And if she can't come, she will long and crave to be with you all, so isn't it better that you shouldn't be the means of making her unhappy?"

"Never mind!" responded Pao-yü. "I'll tell our venerable senior to despatch

some one to bring her over."

But in the middle of their conversation, nurse Sung returned already from her mission, and expressed to him, (Hsiang-yün's) acknowledgment; and to Hsi Jen her thanks for the trouble. "She also inquired," the nurse proceeded, "what you, master Secundus, were up to, and I told her that you had started some poetical club or other with the young ladies and that you were engaged in writing verses. Miss Shih wondered why it was, if you were writing verses, that you didn't even mention anything to her; and she was extremely distressed about it."

Pao-yü, at these words, turned himself round and betook himself immediately into his grandmother's apartments, where he did all that lay in his power to urge her to depute servants to go and fetch her.

"It's too late to-day," dowager lady Chia answered; "they'll go tomorrow, as soon as it's daylight."

Pao-yü had no other course but to accede to her wishes. He, however, retraced his steps back to his room with a heavy heart. On the morrow, at early dawn, he paid another visit to old lady Chia and brought pressure to bear on her until she sent some one for her. Soon after midday, Shih Hsiang-yün arrived. Pao-yü felt at length much relieved in his mind. Upon meeting her, he recounted to her all that had taken place from beginning to end. His purpose was likewise to let her see the poetical composition, but Li Wan and the others remonstrated. "Don't," they said, "allow her to see them! First tell her the rhymes and number of feet; and, as she comes late, she should, as a first step, pay a penalty by conforming to the task we had to do. Should what she writes be good, then she can readily be admitted as a member of the society; but if not good, she should be further punished by being made to stand a treat; after which, we can decide what's to be done."

"You've forgotten to ask me round," Hsiang-yün laughed, "and I should, after all, fine you people! But produce the metre; for though I don't excel in versifying, I shall exert myself to do the best I can, so as to get rid of every slur. If you will admit me into the club, I shall be even willing to sweep the floors and burn the incense."

When they all saw how full of fun she was, they felt more than ever delighted with her and they reproached themselves, for having somehow or other managed

to forget her on the previous day. But they lost no time in telling her the metre of the verses.

Shih Hsiang-yün was inwardly in ecstasies. So much so, that she could not wait to beat the tattoo and effect any alterations. But having succeeded, while conversing with her cousins, in devising a stanza in her mind, she promptly inscribed it on the first piece of paper that came to hand. “I have,” she remarked, with a precursory smile, “stuck to the metre and written two stanzas. Whether they be good or bad, I cannot say; all I’ve kept in view was to simply comply with your wishes.”

So speaking, she handed her paper to the company.

“We thought our four stanzas,” they observed, “had so thoroughly exhausted everything that could be imagined on the subject that another stanza was out of the question, and there you’ve devised a couple more! How could there be so much to say? These must be mere repetitions of our own sentiments.”

While bandying words, they perused her two stanzas. They found this to be their burden:

No. 1.

The fairies yesterday came down within the city gates, And like those gems, sown in the grassy field, planted one pot. How clear it is that the goddess of frost is fond of cold! It is no question of a pretty girl bent upon death! Where does the snow, which comes in gloomy weather, issue from? The drops of rain increase the prints, left from the previous night. How the flowers rejoice that bards are not weary of song! But are they ever left to spend in peace a day or night?

No. 2.

The “heng chih” covered steps lead to the creeper-laden door. How fit to plant by the corner of walls; how fit for pots? The flowers so relish purity that they can’t find a mate. Easy in autumn snaps the soul of sorrow-wasted man. The tears, which from the jadelike candle drip, dry in the wind. The crystal-like portiere asunder rends Selene’s rays. Their private feelings to the moon goddess they longed to tell, But gone, alas! is the lustre she shed on the empty court!

Every line filled them with wonder and admiration. What they read, they

praised. “This,” they exclaimed, with one consent, “is not writing verses on the begonia for no purpose! We must really start a Begonia Society!”

“Tomorrow,” Shih Hsiang-yün proposed, “first fine me by making me stand a treat, and letting me be the first to convene a meeting; may I?”

“This would be far better!” they all assented. So producing also the verses, composed the previous day, they submitted them to her for criticism.

In the evening, Hsiang-yün came at the invitation of Pao-ch’ai, to the Heng Wu Yüan to put up with her for the night. By lamplight, Hsiang-yün consulted with her how she was to play the hostess and fix upon the themes; but, after lending a patient ear to all her proposals for a long time, Pao-ch’ai thought them so unsuitable for the occasion, that turning towards her, she raised objections. “If you want,” she said, “to hold a meeting, you have to pay the piper. And albeit it’s for mere fun, you have to make every possible provision; for while consulting your own interests, you must guard against giving umbrage to people. In that case every one will afterwards be happy and contented. You count for nothing too in your own home; and the whole lump sum of those few tiaos, you draw each month, are not sufficient for your own wants, and do you now also wish to burden yourself with this useless sort of thing? Why, if your aunt gets wind of it, won’t she be more incensed with you than ever! What’s more, even though you might fork out all the money you can call your own to bear the outlay of this entertainment with, it won’t be anything like enough, and can it possibly be, pray, that you would go home for the express purpose of requisitioning the necessary funds? Or will you perchance ask for some from in here?”

This long tirade had the effect of bringing the true facts of the case to Hsiang-yün’s notice, and she began to waver in a state of uncertainty.

“I have already fixed upon a plan in my mind,” Pao-ch’ai resumed. “There’s an assistant in our pawnshop from whose family farm come some splendid crabs. Some time back, he sent us a few as a present, and now, starting from our venerable senior and including the inmates of the upper quarters, most of them are quite in love with crabs. It was only the other day that my mother mentioned that she intended inviting our worthy ancestor into the garden to look at the olea flowers and partake of crabs, but she has had her hands so full that she hasn’t as yet asked her round. So just you now drop the poetical meeting, and invite the whole crowd to a show; and if we wait until they go, won’t we be able to indite

as many poems as we like? But let me speak to my brother and ask him to let us have several baskets of the fattest and largest crabs he can get, and to also go to some shop and fetch several jars of luscious wine. And if we then lay out four or five tables with plates full of refreshments, won't we save trouble and all have a jolly time as well?"

As soon as Hsiang-yün heard (the alternative proposed by Pao-ch'ai,) she felt her heart throb with gratitude and in most profuse terms she praised her for her forethought.

"The proposal I've made." Pao-ch'ai pursued smilingly; "is prompted entirely by my sincere feelings for you; so whatever you do don't be touchy and imagine that I look down upon you; for in that case we two will have been good friends all in vain. But if you won't give way to suspicion, I'll be able to tell them at once to go and get things ready."

"My dear cousin," eagerly rejoined Hsiang-yün, a smile on her lips, "if you say these things it's you who treat me with suspicion; for no matter how foolish a person I may be, as not to even know what's good and bad, I'm still a human being! Did I not regard you, cousin, in the same light as my own very sister, I wouldn't last time have had any wish or inclination to disclose to you every bit of those troubles, which ordinarily fall to my share at home."

After listening to these assurances, Pao-ch'ai summoned a matron and bade her go out and tell her master, Hsüeh P'an, to procure a few hampers of crabs of the same kind as those which were sent on the previous occasion. "Our venerable senior," (she said,) "and aunt Wang are asked to come tomorrow after their meal and admire the olea flowers, so mind, impress upon your master to please not forget, as I've already to-day issued the invitations."

The matron walked out of the garden and distinctly delivered the message. But, on her return, she brought no reply.

During this while, Pao-ch'ai continued her conversation with Hsiang-yün. "The themes for the verses," she advised her, "mustn't also be too out-of-the-way. Just search the works of old writers, and where will you find any eccentric and peculiar subjects, or any extra difficult metre! If the subject be too much out-of-the-way and the metre too difficult, one cannot get good verses. In a word, we are a mean lot and our verses are certain, I fear, to consist of mere repetitions.

Nor is it advisable for us to aim at excessive originality. The first thing for us to do is to have our ideas clear, as our language will then not be commonplace. In fact, this sort of thing is no vital matter; spinning and needlework are, in a word, the legitimate duties of you and me. Yet, if we can at any time afford the leisure, it's only right and proper that we should take some book, that will benefit both body and mind, and read a few chapters out of it."

Hsiang-yün simply signified her assent. "I'm now cogitating in my mind," she then laughingly remarked, "that as the verses we wrote yesterday treated of begonias, we should, I think, compose on this occasion some on chrysanthemums, eh? What do you say?"

"Chrysanthemums are in season," Pao-ch'ai replied. "The only objection to them is that too many writers of old have made them the subject of their poems."

"I also think so," Hsiang-yün added, "so that, I fear, we shall only be following in their footsteps."

After some reflection, Pao-ch'ai exclaimed, "I've hit upon something! If we take, for the present instance, the chrysanthemums as a secondary term, and man as the primary, we can, after all, select several themes. But they must all consist of two characters: the one, an empty word; the other, a full one. The full word might be chrysanthemums; while for the empty one, we might employ some word in general use. In this manner, we shall, on one hand, sing the chrysanthemum; and, on the other, compose verses on the theme. And as old writers have not written much in this style, it will be impossible for us to drift into the groove of their ideas. Thus in versifying on the scenery and in singing the objects, we will, in both respects, combine originality with liberality of thought."

"This is all very well," smiled Hsiang-yün. "The only thing is what kind of empty words will, I wonder, be best to use? Just you first think of one and let me see."

Pao-ch'ai plunged in thought for a time, after which she laughingly remarked: "Dream of chrysanthemums is good."

"It's positively good!" Hsiang-yün smiled. "I've also got one: 'the Chrysanthemum shadow,' will that do?"

“Well enough,” Pao-ch’ai answered, “the only objection is that people have written on it; yet if the themes are to be many, we might throw this in. I’ve got another one too!”

“Be quick, and tell it!” Hsiang-yün urged.

“What do you say to ‘ask the Chrysanthemums?’” Pao-ch’ai observed.

Hsiang-yün clapped her hand on the table. “Capital,” she cried. “I’ve thought of one also.” She then quickly continued, “It is, search for chrysanthemums; what’s your idea about it?”

Pao-ch’ai thought that too would do very well. “Let’s choose ten of them first,” she next proposed; “and afterwards note them down!”

While talking, they rubbed the ink and moistened the pens. These preparations over, Hsiang-yün began to write, while Pao-ch’ai enumerated the themes. In a short time, they got ten of them.

“Ten don’t form a set,” Hsiang-yün went on to smilingly suggest, after reading them over. “We’d better complete them by raising their number to twelve; they’ll then also be on the same footing as people’s pictures and books.”

Hearing this proposal, Pao-ch’ai devised another couple of themes, thus bringing them to a dozen. “Well, since we’ve got so far,” she pursued, “let’s go one step further and copy them out in their proper order, putting those that are first, first; and those that come last, last.”

“It would be still better like that,” Hsiang-yün acquiesced, “as we’ll be able to make up a ‘chrysanthemum book.’”

“The first stanza should be: ‘Longing for chrysanthemums,’” Pao-chai said, “and as one cannot get them by wishing, and has, in consequence, to search for them, the second should be ‘searching for chrysanthemums.’ After due search, one finds them, and plants them, so the third must be: ‘planting chrysanthemums.’ After they’ve been planted, they, blossom, and one faces them and enjoys them, so the fourth should be ‘facing the chrysanthemums.’ By facing them, one derives such excessive delight that one plucks them and brings them in and puts them in vases for one’s own delectation, so the fifth must be ‘placing chrysanthemums in vases.’ If no verses are sung in their praise, after they’ve

been placed in vases, it's tantamount to seeing no point of beauty in chrysanthemums, so the sixth must be 'sing about chrysanthemums.' After making them the burden of one's song, one can't help representing them in pictures. The seventh place should therefore be conceded to 'drawing chrysanthemums.' Seeing that in spite of all the labour bestowed on the drawing of chrysanthemums, the fine traits there may be about them are not yet, in fact, apparent, one impulsively tries to find them out by inquiries, so the eighth should be 'asking the chrysanthemums.' As any perception, which the chrysanthemums might display in fathoming the questions set would help to make the inquirer immoderately happy, the ninth must be 'pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair.' And as after everything has been accomplished, that comes within the sphere of man, there will remain still some chrysanthemums about which something could be written, two stanzas on the 'shadow of the chrysanthemums,' and the 'dream about chrysanthemums' must be tagged on as numbers ten and eleven. While the last section should be 'the withering of the chrysanthemums' so as to bring to a close the sentiments expressed in the foregoing subjects. In this wise the fine scenery and fine doings of the third part of autumn, will both alike be included in our themes."

Hsiang-yün signified her approval, and taking the list she copied it out clean. But after once more passing her eye over it, she went on to inquire what rhymes should be determined upon.

"I do not, as a rule, like hard-and-fast rhymes," Pao-ch'ai retorted. "It's evident enough that we can have good verses without them, so what's the use of any rhymes to shackle us? Don't let us imitate that mean lot of people. Let's simply choose our subject and pay no notice to rhymes. Our main object is to see whether we cannot by chance hit upon some well-written lines for the sake of fun. It isn't to make this the means of subjecting people to perplexities."

"What you say is perfectly right," Hsiang-yün observed. "In this manner our poetical composition will improve one step higher. But we only muster five members, and there are here twelve themes. Is it likely that each one of us will have to indite verses on all twelve?"

"That would be far too hard on the members!" Pao-ch'ai rejoined. "But let's copy out the themes clean, for lines with seven words will have to be written on every one, and stick them tomorrow on the wall for general perusal. Each member can write on the subject which may be most in his or her line. Those,

with any ability, may choose all twelve. While those, with none, may only limit themselves to one stanza. Both will do. Those, however, who will show high mental capacity, combined with quickness, will be held the best. But any one, who shall have completed all twelve themes, won't be permitted to hasten and begin over again; we'll have to fine such a one, and finish."

"Yes, that will do," assented Hsiang-yün. But after settling everything satisfactorily, they extinguished the lamp and went to bed.

Reader, do you want to know what subsequently took place? If you do, then listen to what is contained in the way of explanation in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Lin Hsiao-Hsiang carries the first prize in the poems on chrysanthemums. Hsueh Heng-wu chaffs Pao-yü by composing verses in the same style as his on the crabs.

After Pao-ch'ai and Hsiang-yün, we will now explain, settled everything in their deliberations, nothing memorable occurred, the whole night, which deserves to be put on record.

The next day, Hsiang-yün invited dowager lady Chia and her other relatives to come and look at the olea flowers. Old lady Chia and every one else answered that as she had had the kind attention to ask them, they felt it their duty to avail themselves of her gracious invitation, much though they would be putting her to trouble and inconvenience. At twelve o'clock, therefore, old lady Chia actually took with her Madame Wang and lady Feng, as well as Mrs. Hsüeh and other members of her family whom she had asked to join them, and repaired into the garden.

"Which is the best spot?" old lady Chia inquired.

"We are ready to go wherever you may like, dear senior," Madame Wang ventured in response.

“A collation has already been spread in the Lotus Fragrance Arbour,” lady Feng interposed. “Besides, the two olea plants, on that hill, yonder, are now lovely in their full blossom, and the water of that stream is jadelike and pellucid, so if we sit in the pavilion in the middle of it, won’t we enjoy an open and bright view? It will be refreshing too to our eyes to watch the pool.”

“Quite right!” assented dowager lady Chia at this suggestion; and while expressing her approbation, she ushered her train of followers into the Arbour of Lotus Fragrance.

This Arbour of Lotus Fragrance had, in fact, been erected in the centre of the pool. It had windows on all four sides. On the left and on the right, stood covered passages, which spanned the stream and connected with the hills. At the back, figured a winding bridge.

As the party ascended the bamboo bridge, lady Feng promptly advanced and supported dowager lady Chia. “Venerable ancestor,” she said, “just walk boldly and with confident step; there’s nothing to fear; it’s the way of these bamboo bridges to go on creaking like this.”

Presently, they entered the arbour. Here they saw two additional bamboo tables, placed beyond the balustrade. On the one, were arranged cups, chopsticks and every article necessary for drinking wine. On the other, were laid bamboo utensils for tea, a tea-service and various cups and saucers. On the off side, two or three waiting-maids were engaged in fanning the stove to boil the water for tea. On the near side were visible several other girls, who were trying with their fans to get a fire to light in the stove so as to warm the wines.

“It was a capital idea,” dowager lady Chia hastily exclaimed laughingly with vehemence, “to bring tea here. What’s more, the spot and the appurtenances are alike so spick and span!”

“These things were brought by cousin Pao-ch’ai,” Hsiang-yün smilingly explained, “so I got them ready.”

“This child is, I say, so scrupulously particular,” old lady Chia observed, “that everything she does is thoroughly devised.”

As she gave utterance to her feelings, her attention was attracted by a pair of scrolls of black lacquer, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, suspended on the pillars,

and she asked Hsiang-yün to tell her what the mottoes were.

The text she read was:

Snapped is the shade of the hibiscus by the fragrant oar of a boat homeward bound. Deep flows the perfume of the lily and the lotus underneath the bamboo bridge.

After listening to the motto, old lady Chia raised her head and cast a glance upon the tablet; then turning round: “Long ago, when I was young,” she observed, addressing herself to Mrs. Hsüeh, “we likewise had at home a pavilion like this called ‘the Hall reclining on the russet clouds,’ or some other such name. At that time, I was of the same age as the girls, and my wont was to go day after day and play with my sisters there. One day, I, unexpectedly, slipped and fell into the water, and I had a narrow escape from being drowned; for it was after great difficulty, that they managed to drag me out safe and sound. But my head was, after all, bumped about against the wooden nails; so much so, that this hole of the length of a finger, which you can see up to this day on my temple, comes from the bruises I sustained. All my people were in a funk that I’d be the worse for this ducking and continued in fear and trembling lest I should catch a chill. ‘It was dreadful, dreadful!’ they opined, but I managed, little though every one thought it, to keep in splendid health.”

Lady Feng allowed no time to any one else to put in a word; but anticipating them: “Had you then not survived, who would now be enjoying these immense blessings!” she smiled. “This makes it evident that no small amount of happiness and long life were in store for you, venerable ancestor, from your very youth up! It was by the agency of the spirits that this hole was knocked open so that they might fill it up with happiness and longevity! The old man Shou Hsing had, in fact, a hole in his head, which was so full of every kind of blessing conducive to happiness and long life that it bulged up ever so high!”

Before, however, she could conclude, dowager lady Chia and the rest were convulsed with such laughter that their bodies doubled in two.

“This monkey is given to dreadful tricks!” laughed old lady Chia. “She’s always ready to make a scapegoat of me to evoke amusement. But would that I could take that glib mouth of yours and rend it in pieces.”

“It’s because I feared that the cold might, when you by and bye have some crabs

to eat, accumulate in your intestines," lady Feng pleaded, "that I tried to induce you, dear senior, to have a laugh, so as to make you gay and merry. For one can, when in high spirits, indulge in a couple of them more with impunity."

"By and bye," smiled old lady Chia, "I'll make you follow me day and night, so that I may constantly be amused and feel my mind diverted; I won't let you go back to your home."

"It's that weakness of yours for her, venerable senior," Madame Wang observed with a smile, "that has got her into the way of behaving in this manner, and, if you go on speaking to her as you do, she'll soon become ever so much the more unreasonable."

"I like her such as she is," dowager lady Chia laughed. "Besides, she's truly no child, ignorant of the distinction between high and low. When we are at home, with no strangers present, we ladies should be on terms like these, and as long, in fact, as we don't overstep propriety, it's all right. If not, what would he the earthly use of making them behave like so many saints?"

While bandying words, they entered the pavilion in a body. After tea, lady Feng hastened to lay out the cups and chopsticks. At the upper table then seated herself old lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and Pao-yü. Round the table, on the east, sat Shih Hsiang-yün, Madame Wang, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un. At the small table, leaning against the door on the west side, Li Wan and lady Feng assigned themselves places. But it was for the mere sake of appearances, as neither of them ventured to sit down, but remained in attendance at the two tables, occupied by old lady Chia and Madame Wang.

"You'd better," lady Feng said, "not bring in too many crabs at a time. Throw these again into the steaming-basket! Only serve ten; and when they're eaten, a fresh supply can be fetched!"

Asking, at the same time, for water, she washed her hands, and, taking her position near dowager lady Chia, she scooped out the meat from a crab, and offered the first help to Mrs. Hsüeh.

"They'll be sweeter were I to open them with my own hands," Mrs. Hsüeh remarked, "there's no need for any one to serve me."

Lady Feng, therefore, presented it to old lady Chia and handed a second portion

to Pao-yü.

“Make the wine as warm as possible and bring it in!” she then went on to cry. “Go,” she added, directing the servant-girls, “and fetch the powder, made of green beans, and scented with the leaves of chrysanthemums and the stamens of the olea fragrans; and keep it ready to rinse our hands with.”

Shih Hsiang-yün had a crab to bear the others company, but no sooner had she done than she retired to a lower seat, from where she helped her guests. When she, however, walked out a second time to give orders to fill two dishes and send them over to Mrs. Chao, she perceived lady Feng come up to her again. “You’re not accustomed to entertaining,” she said, “so go and have your share to eat. I’ll attend to the people for you first, and, when they’ve gone, I’ll have all I want.”

Hsiang-yün would not agree to her proposal. But giving further directions to the servants to spread two tables under the verandah on the off-side, she pressed Yüan Yang, Hu Po, Ts’ai Hsia, Ts’ai Yün and P’ing Erh to go and seat themselves.

“Lady Secunda,” consequently ventured Yüan Yang, “you’re in here doing the honours, so may I go and have something to eat?”

“You can all go,” replied lady Feng; “leave everything in my charge, and it will be all right.”

While these words were being spoken, Shih Hsiang-yün resumed her place at the banquet. Lady Feng and Li Wan then took hurry-scurry something to eat as a matter of form; but lady Feng came down once more to look after things. After a time, she stepped out on the verandah where Yüan Yang and the other girls were having their refreshments in high glee. As soon as they caught sight of her, Yuan Yang and her companions stood up. “What has your ladyship come out again for?” they inquired. “Do let us also enjoy a little peace and quiet!”

“This chit Yüan Yang is worse than ever!” lady Feng laughed. “Here I’m slaving away for you, and, instead of feeling grateful to me, you bear me a grudge! But don’t you yet quick pour me a cup of wine?”

Yüan Yang immediately smiled, and filling a cup, she applied it to lady Feng’s lips. Lady Feng stretched out her neck and emptied it. But Hu Po and Ts’ai Hsia thereupon likewise replenished a cup and put it to lady Feng’s mouth. Lady Feng

swallowed the contents of that as well. P'ing Erh had, by this time, brought her some yellow meat which she had picked out from the shell. "Pour plenty of ginger and vinegar!" shouted lady Feng, and, in a moment, she made short work of that too. "You people," she smiled, "had better sit down and have something to eat, for I'm off now."

"You brazen-faced thing," exclaimed Yüan Yang laughingly, "to eat what was intended for us!"

"Don't be so captious with me!" smiled lady Feng. "Are you aware that your master Secundus, Mr. Lien, has taken such a violent fancy to you that he means to speak to our old lady to let you be his secondary wife!"

Yüan Yang blushed crimson. "Ts'ui!" she shouted. "Are these really words to issue from the mouth of a lady! But if I don't daub your face all over with my filthy hands, I won't feel happy!"

Saying this, she rushed up to her. She was about to besmear her face, when lady Feng pleaded: "My dear child, do let me off this time!"

"Lo, that girl Yüan," laughed Hu Po, "wishes to smear her, and that hussey P'ing still spares her! Look here, she has scarcely had two crabs, and she has drunk a whole saucerful of vinegar!"

P'ing Erh was holding a crab full of yellow meat, which she was in the act of cleaning. As soon therefore as she heard this taunt, she came, crab in hand, to spatter Hu Po's face, as she laughingly reviled her. "I'll take you minx with that cajoling tongue of yours" she cried, "and…."

But, Hu Po, while also indulging in laughter, drew aside; so P'ing Erh beat the air, and fell forward, daubing, by a strange coincidence, the cheek of lady Feng. Lady Feng was at the moment having a little good-humoured raillery with Yüan Yang, and was taken so much off her guard, that she was quite startled out of her senses. "Ai-yah!" she ejaculated. The bystanders found it difficult to keep their countenance, and, with one voice, they exploded into a boisterous fit of laughter. Lady Feng as well could not help feeling amused, and smilingly she upbraided her. "You stupid wench!" she said; "Have you by gorging lost your eyesight that you recklessly smudge your mistress' face?"

P'ing Erh hastily crossed over and wiped her face for her, and then went in

person to fetch some water.

“O-mi-to-fu,” ejaculated Yüan Yang, “this is a distinct retribution!”

Dowager lady Chia, though seated on the other side, overheard their shouts, and she consecutively made inquiries as to what they had seen to tickled their fancy so. “Tell us,” (she urged), “what it is so that we too should have a laugh.”

“Our lady Secunda,” Yüan Yang and the other maids forthwith laughingly cried, “came to steal our crabs and eat them, and P’ing Erh got angry and daubed her mistress’ face all over with yellow meat. So our mistress and that slave-girl are now having a scuffle over it.”

This report filled dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the other inmates with them with much merriment. “Do have pity on her,” dowager lady Chia laughed, “and let her have some of those small legs and entrails to eat, and have done!”

Yuan Yang and her companions assented, much amused. “Mistress Secunda,” they shouted in a loud tone of voice, “you’re at liberty to eat this whole tableful of legs!”

But having washed her face clean, lady Feng approached old lady Chia and the other guests and waited upon them for a time, while they partook of refreshments.

Tai-yü did not, with her weak physique, venture to overload her stomach, so partaking of a little meat from the claws, she left the table. Presently, however, dowager lady Chia too abandoned all idea of having anything more to eat. The company therefore quitted the banquet; and, when they had rinsed their hands, some admired the flowers, some played with the water, others looked at the fish.

After a short stroll, Madame Wang turned round and remarked to old lady Chia: “There’s plenty of wind here. Besides, you’ve just had crabs; so it would be prudent for you, venerable senior, to return home and rest. And if you feel in the humour, we can come again for a turn tomorrow.”

“Quite true!” acquiesced dowager lady Chia, in reply to this suggestion. “I was afraid that if I left, now that you’re all in exuberant spirits, I mightn’t again be spoiling your fun, (so I didn’t budge). But as the idea originates from yourselves do go as you please, (while I retire). But,” she said to Hsiang-yün, “don’t allow

your cousin Secundus, Pao-yü, and your cousin Lin to have too much to eat." Then when Hsiang-yün had signified her obedience, "You two girls," continuing, she recommended Hsiang-yün and Pao-ch'ai, "must not also have more than is good for you. Those things are, it's true, luscious, but they're not very wholesome; and if you eat immoderately of them, why, you'll get stomachaches."

Both girls promised with alacrity to be careful; and, having escorted her beyond the confines of the garden, they retraced their steps and ordered the servants to clear the remnants of the banquet and to lay out a new supply of refreshments.

"There's no use of any regular spread out!" Pao-yü interposed. "When you are about to write verses, that big round table can be put in the centre and the wines and eatables laid on it. Neither will there be any need to ceremoniously have any fixed seats. Let those who may want anything to eat, go up to it and take what they like; and if we seat ourselves, scattered all over the place, won't it be far more convenient for us?"

"Your idea is excellent!" Pao-ch'ai answered.

"This is all very well," Hsiang-yün observed, "but there are others to be studied besides ourselves!"

Issuing consequently further directions for another table to be laid, and picking out some hot crabs, she asked Hsi Jen, Tzu Chüan, Ssu Ch'i, Shih Shu, Ju Hua, Ying Erh, Ts'ui Mo and the other girls to sit together and form a party. Then having a couple of flowered rugs spread under the olea trees on the hills, she bade the matrons on duty, the waiting-maids and other servants to likewise make themselves comfortable and to eat and drink at their pleasure until they were wanted, when they could come and answer the calls.

Hsiang-yün next fetched the themes for the verses and pinned them with a needle on the wall. "They're full of originality," one and all exclaimed after perusal, "we fear we couldn't write anything on them."

Hsiang-yün then went onto explain to them the reasons that had prompted her not to determine upon any particular rhymes.

"Yes, quite right!" put in Pao-yü. "I myself don't fancy hard and fast rhymes!"

But Lin Tai-yü, being unable to stand much wine and to take any crabs, told, on her own account, a servant to fetch an embroidered cushion; and, seating herself in such a way as to lean against the railing, she took up a fishing-rod and began to fish. Pao-ch'ai played for a time with a twig of olea she held in her hand, then resting on the window-sill, she plucked the petals, and threw them into the water, attracting the fish, which went by, to rise to the surface and nibble at them. Hsiang-yün, after a few moments of abstraction, urged Hsi Jen and the other girls to help themselves to anything they wanted, and beckoned to the servants, seated at the foot of the hill, to eat to their heart's content. Tan Ch'un, in company with Li Wan and Hsi Ch'un, stood meanwhile under the shade of the weeping willows, and looked at the widgeons and egrets. Ying Ch'un, on the other hand, was all alone under the shade of some trees, threading double jasmine flowers, with a needle specially adapted for the purpose. Pao-yü too watched Tai-yü fishing for a while. At one time he leant next to Pao-ch'ai and cracked a few jokes with her. And at another, he drank, when he noticed Hsi Jen feasting on crabs with her companions, a few mouthfuls of wine to keep her company. At this, Hsi Jen cleaned the meat out of a shell, and gave it to him to eat.

Tai-yü then put down the fishing-rod, and, approaching the seats, she laid hold of a small black tankard, ornamented with silver plum flowers, and selected a tiny cup, made of transparent stone, red like a begonia, and in the shape of a banana leaf. A servant-girl observed her movements, and, concluding that she felt inclined to have a drink, she drew near with hurried step to pour some wine for her.

"You girls had better go on eating," Tai-yü remonstrated, "and let me help myself; there'll be some fun in it then!"

So speaking, she filled for herself a cup half full; but discovering that it was yellow wine, "I've eaten only a little bit of crab," she said, "and yet I feel my mouth slightly sore; so what would do for me now is a mouthful of very hot distilled spirit."

Pao-yü hastened to take up her remark. "There's some distilled spirit," he chimed in. "Take some of that wine," he there and then shouted out to a servant, "scented with acacia flowers, and warm a tankard of it."

When however it was brought Tai-yü simply took a sip and put it down again.

Pao-ch’ai too then came forward, and picked up a double cup; but, after drinking a mouthful of it, she lay it aside, and, moistening her pen, she walked up to the wall, and marked off the first theme: “longing for chrysanthemums,” below which she appended a character “Heng.”

“My dear cousin,” promptly remarked Pao-yü. “I’ve already got four lines of the second theme so let me write on it!”

“I managed, after ever so much difficulty, to put a stanza together,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “and are you now in such a hurry to deprive me of it?”

Without so much as a word, Tai-yü took a pen and put a distinctive sign opposite the eighth, consisting of: “ask the chrysanthemums;” and, singling out, in quick succession, the eleventh: “dream of chrysanthemums,” as well, she too affixed for herself the word “Hsiao” below. But Pao-yü likewise got a pen, and marked his choice, the twelfth on the list: “seek for chrysanthemums,” by the side of which he wrote the character “Chiang.”

T’an Ch’un thereupon rose to her feet. “If there’s no one to write on ‘Pinning the chrysanthemums’” she observed, while scrutinising the themes, “do let me have it! It has just been ruled,” she continued, pointing at Pao-yü with a significant smile, “that it is on no account permissible to introduce any expressions, bearing reference to the inner chambers, so you’d better be on your guard!”

But as she spoke, she perceived Hsiang-yün come forward, and jointly mark the fourth and fifth, that is: “facing the chrysanthemums,” and “putting chrysanthemums in vases,” to which she, like the others, appended a word, Hsiang.”

“You too should get a style or other!” T’an Ch’un suggested.

“In our home,” smiled Hsiang-yün, “there exist, it is true, at present several halls and structures, but as I don’t live in either, there’ll be no fun in it were I to borrow the name of any one of them!”

“Our venerable senior just said,” Pao-ch’ai observed laughingly, “that there was also in your home a water-pavilion called ‘leaning on russet clouds hall,’ and is it likely that it wasn’t yours? But albeit it doesn’t exist now-a-days, you were anyhow its mistress of old.”

“She’s right!” one and all exclaimed.

Pao-yü therefore allowed Hsiang-yün no time to make a move, but forthwith rubbed off the character “Hsiang,” for her and substituted that of “Hsia” (russet).

A short time only elapsed before the compositions on the twelve themes had all been completed. After they had each copied out their respective verses, they handed them to Ying Ch’un, who took a separate sheet of snow-white fancy paper, and transcribed them together, affixing distinctly under each stanza the style of the composer. Li Wan and her assistants then began to read, starting from the first on the list, the verses which follow:

“Longing for chrysanthemums,” by the “Princess of Heng Wu.”

With anguish sore I face the western breeze, and wrapt in grief, I pine for you! What time the smart weed russet turns, and the reeds white, my heart is rent in two. When in autumn the hedges thin, and gardens waste, all trace of you is gone. When the moon waxeth cold, and the dew pure, my dreams then know something of you. With constant yearnings my heart follows you as far as wild geese homeward fly. Lonesome I sit and lend an ear, till a late hour to the sound of the block! For you, ye yellow flowers, I’ve grown haggard and worn, but who doth pity me, And breathe one word of cheer that in the ninth moon I will soon meet you again?

“Search for chrysanthemums,” by the “Gentleman of I Hung:”

When I have naught to do, I'll seize the first fine day to try and stroll about. Neither wine-cups nor cups of medicine will then deter me from my wish. Who plants the flowers in all those spots, facing the dew and under the moon's rays? Outside the rails they grow and by the hedge; but in autumn where do they go? With sandals waxed I come from distant shores; my feelings all exuberant; But as on this cold day I can't exhaust my song, my spirits get depressed. The yellow flowers, if they but knew how comfort to a poet to afford, Would not let me this early morn trudge out in vain with my cash-laden staff.

"Planting chrysanthemums," by the Gentleman of "I Hung:"

When autumn breaks, I take my hoe, and moving them myself out of the park, I plant them everywhere near the hedges and in the foreground of the halls. Last night, when least expected, they got a good shower, which made them all revive. This morn my spirits still rise high, as the buds burst in bloom bedecked with frost. Now that it's cool, a thousand stanzas on the autumn scenery I sing. In ecstasies from drink, I toast their blossom in a cup of cold, and fragrant wine. With spring water. I sprinkle them, cover the roots with mould and well tend them, So that they may, like the path near the well, be free of every grain of dirt.

"Facing the chrysanthemums," by the "Old friend of the Hall reclining on the russet clouds."

From other gardens I transplant them, and I treasure them like gold. One cluster bears light-coloured bloom; another bears dark shades. I sit with head uncovered by the sparse-leaved artemesia hedge, And in their pure and cool fragrance, clasping my knees, I hum my lays. In the whole world, methinks, none see the light as peerless as these flowers. From all I see you have no other friend more intimate than me. Such autumn splendour, I must not misuse, as steadily it fleets. My gaze I fix on you as I am fain each moment to enjoy!

"Putting chrysanthemums in vases," by the "Old Friend of the hall reclining on the russet clouds."

The lute I thrum, and quaff my wine, joyful at heart that ye are meet to be my mates. The various tables, on which ye are laid, adorn with beauteous grace this quiet nook. The fragrant dew, next to the spot I sit, is far apart from that by the three paths. I fling my book aside and turn my gaze upon a twig full of your autumn (bloom). What time the frost is pure, a new dream steals o'er me, as by

the paper screen I rest. When cold holdeth the park, and the sun's rays do slant, I long and yearn for you, old friends. I too differ from others in this world, for my own tastes resemble those of yours. The vernal winds do not hinder the peach tree and the pear from bursting forth in bloom.

"Singing chrysanthemums," by the "Hsiao Hsiang consort."

Eating the bread of idleness, the frenzy of poetry creeps over me both night and day. Round past the hedge I wend, and, leaning on the rock, I intone verses gently to myself. From the point of my pencil emanate lines of recondite grace, so near the frost I write. Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth, and, turning to the moon, I sing my sentiments. With self-pitying lines pages I fill, so as utterance to give to all my cares and woes. From these few scanty words, who could fathom the secrets of my heart about the autumntide? Beginning from the time when T'ao, the magistrate, did criticise the beauty of your bloom, Yea, from that date remote up to this very day, your high renown has ever been extolled.

"Drawing chrysanthemums," by the "Princess of Heng Wu."

Verses I've had enough, so with my pens I play; with no idea that I am mad. Do I make use of pigments red or green as to involve a task of toilsome work? To form clusters of leaves, I sprinkle simply here and there a thousand specks of ink. And when I've drawn the semblance of the flowers, some spots I make to represent the frost. The light and dark so lifelike harmonise with the figure of those there in the wind, That when I've done tracing their autumn growth, a fragrant smell issues under my wrist. Do you not mark how they resemble those, by the east hedge, which you leisurely pluck? Upon the screens their image I affix to solace me for those of the ninth moon.

"Asking the chrysanthemums," by the "Hsiao Hsiang consort."

Your heart, in autumn, I would like to read, but know it no one could! While humming with my arms behind my back, on the east hedge I rap. So peerless and unique are ye that who is meet with you to stay? Why are you of all flowers the only ones to burst the last in bloom? Why in such silence plunge the garden dew and the frost in the hall? When wild geese homeward fly and crickets sicken, do you think of me? Do not tell me that in the world none of you grow with power of speech? But if ye fathom what I say, why not converse with me a while?

"Pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair," by the "Visitor under the banana

trees.”

I put some in a vase, and plant some by the hedge, so day by day I have ample to do. I pluck them, yet don’t fancy they are meant for girls to pin before the glass in their coiffure. My mania for these flowers is just as keen as was that of the squire, who once lived in Ch’ang An. I rave as much for them as raved Mr. P’eng Tsê, when he was under the effects of wine. Cold is the short hair on his temples and moistened with dew, which on it dripped from the three paths. His flaxen turban is suffused with the sweet fragrance of the autumn frost in the ninth moon. That strong weakness of mine to pin them in my hair is viewed with sneers by my contemporaries. They clap their hands, but they are free to laugh at me by the roadside as much us e’er they list.

“The shadow of the chrysanthemums,” by the “Old Friend of the hall reclining on the russet clouds.”

In layers upon layers their autumn splendour grows and e’er thick and thicker. I make off furtively, and stealthily transplant them from the three crossways. The distant lamp, inside the window-frame, depicts their shade both far and near. The hedge riddles the moon’s rays, like unto a sieve, but the flowers stop the holes. As their reflection cold and fragrant tarries here, their soul must too abide. The dew-dry spot beneath the flowers is so like them that what is said of dreams is trash. Their precious shadows, full of subtle scent, are trodden down to pieces here and there. Could any one with eyes half closed from drinking, not mistake the shadow for the flowers.

“Dreaming of chrysanthemums,” by the “Hsiao Hsiang consort.”

What vivid dreams arise as I dose by the hedge amidst those autumn scenes! Whether clouds bear me company or the moon be my mate, I can’t discern. In fairyland I soar, not that I would become a butterfly like Chang. So long I for my old friend T’ao, the magistrate, that I again seek him. In a sound sleep I fell; but so soon as the wild geese cried, they broke my rest. The chirp of the cicadas gave me such a start that I bear them a grudge. My secret wrongs to whom can I go and divulge, when I wake up from sleep? The faded flowers and the cold mist make my feelings of anguish know no bounds.

“Fading of the chrysanthemums,” by the “Visitor under the banana trees.”

The dew congeals; the frost waxes in weight; and gradually dwindles their

bloom. After the feast, with the flower show, follows the season of the ‘little snow.’ The stalks retain still some redundant smell, but the flowers’ golden tinge is faint. The stems do not bear sign of even one whole leaf; their verdure is all past. Naught but the chirp of crickets strikes my ear, while the moon shines on half my bed. Near the cold clouds, distant a thousand li, a flock of wild geese slowly fly. When autumn breaks again next year, I feel certain that we will meet once more. We part, but only for a time, so don’t let us indulge in anxious thoughts.

Each stanza they read they praised; and they heaped upon each other incessant eulogiums.

“Let me now criticise them; I’ll do so with all fairness!” Li Wan smiled. “As I glance over the page,” she said, “I find that each of you has some distinct admirable sentiments; but in order to be impartial in my criticism to-day, I must concede the first place to: ‘Singing the chrysanthemums;’ the second to: ‘Asking the chrysanthemums;’ and the third to: ‘Dreaming of chrysanthemums.’ The original nature of the themes makes the verses full of originality, and their conception still more original. But we must allow to the ‘Hsiao Hsiang consort’ the credit of being the best; next in order following: ‘Pinning chrysanthemums in the hair,’ ‘Facing the chrysanthemums,’ ‘Putting the chrysanthemums, in vases,’ ‘Drawing the chrysanthemums,’ and ‘Longing for chrysanthemums,’ as second best.”

This decision filled Pao-yü with intense gratification. Clapping his hands, “Quite right! it’s most just,” he shouted.

“My verses are worth nothing!” Tai-yü remarked. “Their fault, after all, is that they are a little too minutely subtile.”

“They are subtile but good,” Li Wan rejoined; “for there’s no artificialness or stiffness about them.”

“According to my views,” Tai-yü observed, “the best line is:

“‘When cold holdeth the park and the sun’s rays do slant, I long and yearn for you, old friends.’

“The metonomy:

“‘I fling my book aside and turn my gaze upon a twig of autumn.’

is already admirable! She has dealt so exhaustively with ‘putting chrysanthemums in a vase’ that she has left nothing unsaid that could be said, and has had in consequence to turn her thought back and consider the time anterior to their being plucked and placed in vases. Her sentiments are profound!”

“What you say is certainly so,” explained Li Wan smiling; “but that line of yours:

“‘Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth,….’

“beats that.”

“After all,” said T’an Ch’un, “we must admit that there’s depth of thought in those of the ‘Princess of Heng Wu’ with:

”’…in autumn all trace of you is gone;’

“and

”’…my dreams then know something of you!’

“They really make the meaning implied by the words ‘long for’ stand out clearly.”

“Those passages of yours:

“‘Cold is the short hair on his temples and moistened….’

“and

“‘His flaxen turban is suffused with the sweet fragrance….;’”

laughingly observed Puo-ch’ai, “likewise bring out the idea of ‘pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair’ so thoroughly that one couldn’t get a loop hole for fault-finding.”

Hsiang-yün then smiled.

”’…who is meet with you to stay’”

she said, “and

”’…burst the last in bloom.’

“are questions so straight to the point set to the chrysanthemums, that they are quite at a loss what answer to give.”

“Were what you say:

“‘I sit with head uncovered….’

“and

”’…clasping my knees, I hum my lays….’

“as if you couldn’t, in fact, tear yourself away for even a moment from them,” Li Wan laughed, “to come to the knowledge of the chrysanthemums, why, they would certainly be sick and tired of you.”

This joke made every one laugh.

“I’m last again!” smiled Pao-yü. “Is it likely that:

“‘Who plants the flowers?…. …in autumn where do they go? With sandals waxed I come from distant shores;…. …and as on this cold day I can’t exhaust my song;….’

“do not all forsooth amount to searching for chrysanthemums? And that

“‘Last night they got a shower…. And this morn … bedecked with frost,’

“don’t both bear on planting them? But unfortunately they can’t come up to these lines:

“‘Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth and turning to the moon I sing my sentiments.’ ‘In their pure and cool fragrance, clasping my knees I hum my lays.’ ‘…short hair on his temples….’ ‘His flaxen turban…. …golden tinge is faint. … verdure is all past. …in autumn … all trace of you is gone. …my dreams then know something of you.’

“But tomorrow,” he proceeded, “if I have got nothing to do, I’ll write twelve stanzas my self.”

“Yours are also good,” Li Wan pursued, “the only thing is that they aren’t as full of original conception as those other lines, that’s all.”

But after a few further criticisms, they asked for some more warm crabs; and, helping themselves, as soon as they were brought, from the large circular table, they regaled themselves for a time.

“With the crabs to-day in one’s hand and the olea before one’s eyes, one cannot help inditing verses,” Pao-yü smiled. “I’ve already thought of a few; but will any of you again have the pluck to devise any?”

With this challenge, he there and then hastily washed his hands and picking up a pen he wrote out what, his companions found on perusal, to run in this strain:

When in my hands I clasp a crab what most enchants my heart is the cassia’s cool shade. While I pour vinegar and ground ginger, I feel from joy as if I would go mad. With so much gluttony the prince’s grandson eats his crabs that he should have some wine. The side-walking young gentleman has no intestines in his frame at all. I lose sight in my greediness that in my stomach cold accumulates. To my fingers a strong smell doth adhere and though I wash them yet the smell clings fast. The main secret of this is that men in this world make much of food. The P’o Spirit has laughed at them that all their lives they only seek to eat.

“I could readily compose a hundred stanzas with such verses in no time,” Tai-yü observed with a sarcastic smile.

“Your mental energies are now long ago exhausted,” Pao-yü rejoined laughingly, “and instead of confessing your inability to devise any, you still go on heaping invective upon people!”

Tai-yü, upon catching this insinuation, made no reply of any kind; but slightly raising her head she hummed something to herself for a while, and then taking up a pen she completed a whole stanza with a few dashes.

The company then read her lines. They consisted of—

E’en after death, their armour and their lengthy spears are never cast away. So nice they look, piled in the plate, that first to taste them I’d fain be. In every pair of legs they have, the crabs are full of tender jadelike meat. Each piece of ruddy fat, which in their shell bumps up, emits a fragrant smell. Besides much meat, they have a greater relish for me still, eight feet as well. Who bids me drink a thousand cups of wine in order to enhance my joy? What time I can behold their luscious food, with the fine season doth accord When cassias wave with fragrance pure, and the chrysanthemums are decked with frost.

Pao-yü had just finished conning it over and was beginning to sing its praise, when Tai-yü, with one snatch, tore it to pieces and bade a servant go and burn it.

“As my compositions can’t come up to yours,” she then observed, “I’ll burn it. Yours is capital, much better than the lines you wrote a little time back on the chrysanthemums, so keep it for the benefit of others.”

“I’ve likewise succeeded, after much effort, in putting together a stanza,” Pao-ch’ai laughingly remarked. “It cannot, of course, be worth much, but I’ll put it down for fun’s sake.”

As she spoke, she too wrote down her lines. When they came to look at them, they read—

On this bright beauteous day, I bask in the dryandra shade, with a cup in my hand. When I was at Ch’ang An, with drivelling mouth, I longed for the ninth day of the ninth moon. The road stretches before their very eyes, but they can’t tell between straight and transverse. Under their shells in spring and autumn only reigns a vacuum, yellow and black.

At this point, they felt unable to refrain from shouting: “Excellent!” “She abuses in fine style!” Pao-yü shouted. “But my lines should also be committed to the flames.”

The company thereupon scanned the remainder of the stanza, which was couched in this wise:

When all the stock of wine is gone, chrysanthemums then use to scour away the smell. So as to counteract their properties of gath’ring cold, fresh ginger you should take. Alas! now that they have been dropped into the boiling pot, what good do they derive? About the moonlit river banks there but remains the

fragrant aroma of corn.

At the close of their perusal, they with one voice, explained that this was a first-rate song on crab-eating; that minor themes of this kind should really conceal lofty thoughts, before they could be held to be of any great merit, and that the only thing was that it chaffed people rather too virulently.

But while they were engaged in conversation, P'ing Erh was again seen coming into the garden. What she wanted is not, however, yet known; so, reader, peruse the details given in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The tongue of the village old dame finds as free vent as a river that has broken its banks. The affectionate cousin makes up his mind to sift to the very bottom the story told by old goody Liu.

Upon seeing, the story explains, P'ing Erh arrive, they unanimously inquired, "What is your mistress up to? How is it she hasn't come?"

"How ever could she spare the time to get as far as here?" P'ing Erh smiled and replied. "But, she said, she hasn't anything good to eat, so she bade me, as she couldn't possibly run over, come and find out whether there be any more crabs or not; (if there be), she enjoined me to ask for a few to take to her to eat at home."

"There are plenty!" Hsiang-yün rejoined; and directing, with alacrity, a servant to fetch a present box, she put in it ten of the largest crabs.

"I'll take a few more of the female ones," P'ing Erh remarked.

One and all then laid hands upon P'ing Erh and tried to drag her into a seat, but P'ing Erh would not accede to their importunities.

"I insist upon your sitting down," Li Wan laughingly exclaimed, and as she kept pulling her about, and forcing her to sit next to her, she filled a cup of wine and

put it to her lips. P'ing Erh hastily swallowed a sip and endeavoured immediately to beat a retreat.

"I won't let you go," shouted Li Wan. "It's so evident that you're only got that woman Feng in your thoughts as you don't listen to any of my words!"

Saying this, she went on to bid the nurses go ahead, and take the box over. "Tell her," she added, "that I've kept P'ing Erh here."

A matron presently returned with a box. "Lady Secunda," she reported, "says that you, lady Chu, and our young mistresses must not make fun of her for having asked for something to eat; and that in this box you'll find cakes made of water-lily powder, and rolls prepared with chicken fat, which your maternal aunt, on the other side, just sent for your ladyship and for you, young ladies, to taste. That she bids you," (the matron) continued, turning towards P'ing Erh, "come over on duty, but your mind is so set upon pleasure that you loiter behind and don't go back. She advises you, however, not to have too many cups of wine."

"Were I even to have too much," P'ing Erh smiled, "what could she do to me?"

Uttering these words, she went on with her drink; after which she partook of some more crab.

"What a pity it is," interposed Li Wan, caressing her, "that a girl with such good looks as you should have so ordinary a fortune as to simply fall into that room as a menial! But wouldn't any one, who is not acquainted with actual facts, take you for a lady and a mistress?"

While she went on eating and drinking with Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang-yün and the other girls, P'ing Erh turned her head round. "Don't rub me like that!" she laughed, "It makes me feel quite ticklish."

"Ai-yo!" shouted Li Wan. "What's this hard thing?"

"It's a key," P'ing Erh answered.

"What fine things have you got that the fear lest people should take it away, prompts you to carry this about you? I keep on, just for a laugh, telling people the whole day long that when the bonze T'ang was fetching the canons, a white horse came and carried him! That when Liu Chih-yüan was attacking the empire,

a melon-spirit appeared and brought him a coat of mail, and that in the same way, where our vixen Feng is, there you are to be found! You are your mistress' general key; and what do you want this other key for?"

"You've primed yourself with wine, my lady," P'ing Erh smiled, "and here you once more chaff me and make a laughing-stock of me."

"This is really quite true," Pao-ch'ai laughed. "Whenever we've got nothing to do, and we talk matters over, (we're quite unanimous) that not one in a hundred could be picked out to equal you girls in here. The beauty is that each one of you possesses her own good qualities!"

"In every thing, whether large or small, a heavenly principle rules alike," Li Wan explained. "Were there, for instance, no Yüan Yang in our venerable senior's apartments, how would it ever do? Commencing with Madame Wang herself, who is it who could muster sufficient courage to expostulate with the old lady? Yet she plainly has the pluck to put in her remonstrances with her; and, as it happens, our worthy ancestor lends a patient ear to only what she says and no one else. None of the others can remember what our old senior has in the way of clothes and head-ornaments, but she can remember everything; and, were she not there to look after things, there is no knowing how many would not be swindled away. That child besides is so straightforward at heart, that, despite all this, she often puts in a good word for others, and doesn't rely upon her influence to look down disdainfully upon any one!"

"It was only yesterday," Hsi Ch'un observed with a smile, "that our dear ancestor said that she was ever so much better than the whole lot of us!"

"She's certainly splendid!" P'ing Erh ventured. "How could we rise up to her standard?"

"Ts'ai Hsia," Pao-yü put in, "who is in mother's rooms, is a good sort of girl!"

"Of course she is!" T'an Ch'un assented. "But she's good enough as far as external appearances go, but inwardly she's a sly one! Madame Wang is just like a joss; she does not give her mind to any sort of business; but this girl is up to everything; and it is she who in all manner of things reminds her mistress what there is to be done. She even knows everything, whether large or small, connected with Mr. Chia Cheng's staying at home or going out of doors; and when at any time Madame Wang forgets, she, from behind the scenes, prompts

her how to act."

"Well, never mind about her!" Li Wan suggested. "But were," she pursued, pointing at Pao-yü, "no Hsi Jen in this young gentleman's quarters, just you imagine what a pitch things would reach! That vixen Feng may truly resemble the prince Pa of the Ch'u kingdom; and she may have two arms strong enough to raise a tripod weighing a thousand catties, but had she not this maid (P'ing Erh), would she be able to accomplish everything so thoroughly?"

"In days gone by," P'ing Erh interposed, "four servant-girls came along with her, but what with those who've died and those who've gone, only I remain like a solitary spirit."

"You're, after all, the fortunate one!" Li Wan retorted, "but our hussey Feng too is lucky in having you! Had I not also once, just remember, two girls, when your senior master Chu was alive? Am I not, you've seen for yourselves, a person to bear with people? But in such a surly frame of mind did I find them both day after day that, as soon as your senior master departed this life, I availed myself of their youth (to give them in marriage) and to pack both of them out of my place. But had either of them been good for anything and worthy to be kept, I would, in fact, have now had some one to give me a helping hand!"

As she spoke, the very balls of her eyes suddenly became quite red.

"Why need you again distress your mind?" they with one voice, exclaimed. "Isn't it better that we should break up?"

While conversing, they rinsed their hands; and, when they had agreed to go in a company to dowager lady Chia's and Madame Wang's and inquire after their health, the matrons and servant-maids swept the pavilion and collected and washed the cups and saucers.

Hsi Jen proceeded on her way along with P'ing Erh. "Come into my room," said Hsi Jen to P'ing Erh, "and sit down and have another cup of tea."

"I won't have any tea just now," P'ing Erh answered. "I'll come some other time."

So saying, she was about to go off when Hsi Jen called out to her and stopped her.

“This month’s allowances,” she asked, “haven’t yet been issued, not even to our old mistress and Madame Wang; why is it?”

Upon catching this inquiry, P’ing Erh hastily retraced her steps and drew near Hsi Jen. After looking about to see that no one was in the neighbourhood, she rejoined in a low tone of voice, “Drop these questions at once! They’re sure, anyhow, to be issued in a couple of days.”

“Why is it,” smiled Hsi Jen, “that this gives you such a start?”

“This month’s allowances,” P’ing Erh explained to her in a whisper, “have long ago been obtained in advance by our mistress Secunda and given to people for their own purposes; and it’s when the interest has been brought from here and there that the various sums will be lumped together and payment be effected. I confide this to you, but, mind, you mustn’t go and tell any other person about it.”

“Is it likely that she hasn’t yet enough money for her own requirements?” Hsi Jen smiled. “Or is it that she’s still not satisfied? And what’s the use of her still going on bothering herself in this way?”

“Isn’t it so!” laughed P’ing Erh. “From just handling the funds for this particular item, she has, during these few years, so manipulated them as to turn up several hundreds of taels profit out of them. Nor does she spend that monthly allowance of hers for public expenses. But the moment she accumulates anything like eight or ten taels odd, she gives them out too. Thus the interest on her own money alone comes up to nearly a thousand taels a year.”

“You and your mistress take our money,” Hsi Jen observed laughingly, “and get interest on it; fooling us as if we were no better than idiots.”

“Here you are again with your uncharitable words!” P’ing Erh remonstrated. “Can it be that you haven’t yet enough to meet your own expenses with?”

“I am, it’s true, not short of money,” Hsi Jen replied, “as I have nowhere to go and spend it; but the thing is that I’m making provision for that fellow of ours, (Pao-yü).”

“If you ever find yourself in any great straits and need money,” P’ing Erh resumed, “you’re at liberty to take first those few taels I’ve got over there to suit your own convenience with, and by and bye I can reduce them from what is due

to you and we'll be square."

"I'm not in need of any just now," retorted Hsi Jen. "But should I not have enough, when I want some, I'll send some one to fetch them, and finish."

P'ing Erh promised that she would let her have the money at any time she sent for it, and, and taking the shortest cut, she issued out of the garden gate. Here she encountered a servant despatched from the other side by lady Feng. She came in search of P'ing Erh. "Our lady," she said, "has something for you to do, and is waiting for you."

"What's up that it's so pressing?" P'ing Erh inquired. "Our senior mistress detained me by force to have a chat, so I couldn't manage to get away. But here she time after time sends people after me in this manner!"

"Whether you go or not is your own look out," the maid replied. "It isn't worth your while getting angry with me! If you dare, go and tell these things to our mistress!"

P'ing Erh spat at her contemptuously, and rushed back in anxious haste. She discovered, however, that lady Feng was not at home. But unexpectedly she perceived that the old goody Liu, who had paid them a visit on a previous occasion for the purpose of obtaining pecuniary assistance, had come again with Pan Erh, and was seated in the opposite room, along with Chang Ts'ai's wife and Chou Jui's wife, who kept her company. But two or three servant-maids were inside as well emptying on the floor bags containing dates, squash and various wild greens.

As soon as they saw her appear in the room, they promptly stood up in a body. Old goody Liu had, on her last visit, learnt what P'ing Erh's status in the establishment was, so vehemently jumping down, she enquired, "Miss, how do you do? All at home," she pursued, "send you their compliments. I meant to have come earlier and paid my respects to my lady and to look you up, miss; but we've been very busy on the farm. We managed this year to reap, after great labour, a few more piculs of grain than usual. But melons, fruits and vegetables have also been plentiful. These things, you see here, are what we picked during the first crop; and as we didn't presume to sell them, we kept the best to present to our lady and the young ladies to taste. The young ladies must, of course, be surfeited with all the delicacies and fine things they daily get, but by having

some of our wild greens to eat, they will show some regard for our poor attention."

"Many thanks for all the trouble you have taken!" Ping Erh eagerly rejoined. Then pressing her to resume her place, she sat down herself; and, urging Mrs. Chang and Mrs. Chou to take their seats, she bade a young waiting-maid go and serve the tea.

"There's a joyous air about your face to-day, Miss, and your eye-balls are all red," the wife of Chou Jui and the wife of Chang Ts'ai thereupon smilingly ventured.

"Naturally!" P'ing Erh laughed. "I generally don't take any wine, but our senior mistress, and our young ladies caught hold of me and insisted upon pouring it down my throat. I had no alternative therefore but to swallow two cups full; so my face at once flushed crimson."

"I have a longing for wine," Chang Ts'ai's wife smiled; "but there's no one to offer me any. But when any one by and by invites you, Miss, do take me along with you!"

At these words, one and all burst out laughing.

"Early this morning," Chou Jui's wife interposed, "I caught a glimpse of those crabs. Only two or three of them would weigh a catty; so in those two or three huge hampers, there must have been, I presume, seventy to eighty catties!"

"If some were intended for those above as well as for those below;" Chou Jui's wife added, "they couldn't, nevertheless, I fear, have been enough."

"How could every one have had any?" P'ing Erh observed. "Those simply with any name may have tasted a couple of them; but, as for the rest, some may have touched them with the tips of their hands, but many may even not have done as much."

"Crabs of this kind!" put in old goody Liu, "cost this year five candareens a catty; ten catties for five mace; five times five make two taels five, and three times five make fifteen; and adding what was wanted for wines and eatables, the total must have come to something over twenty taels. O-mi-to-fu! why, this heap of money is ample for us country-people to live on through a whole year!"

“I expect you have seen our lady?” P’ing Erh then asked.

“Yes, I have seen her,” assented old goody Liu. “She bade us wait.” As she spoke, she again looked out of the window to see what the time of the day could be. “It’s getting quite late,” she afterwards proceeded. “We must be going, or else we mayn’t be in time to get out of the city gates; and then we’ll be in a nice fix.”

“Quite right,” Chou Jui’s wife observed. “I’ll go and see what she’s up to for you.”

With these words, she straightway left the room. After a long absence, she returned. “Good fortune has, indeed, descended upon you, old dame!” she smiled. “Why, you’ve won the consideration of those two ladies!”

“What about it?” laughingly inquired P’ing Erh and the others.

“Lady Secunda,” Chou Jui’s wife explained with a smile, “was with our venerable lady, so I gently whispered to her: ‘old goody Liu wishes to go home; it’s getting late and she fears she mightn’t be in time to go out of the gates!’ ‘It’s such a long way off!’ Our lady Secunda rejoined, ‘and she had all the trouble and fatigue of carrying that load of things; so if it’s too late, why, let her spend the night here and start on the morrow!’ Now isn’t this having enlisted our mistress’ sympathies? But not to speak of this! Our old lady also happened to overhear what we said, and she inquired: ‘who is old goody Liu?’ Our lady Secunda forthwith told her all. ‘I was just longing,’ her venerable ladyship pursued, ‘for some one well up in years to have a chat with; ask her in, and let me see her!’ So isn’t this coming in for consideration, when least unexpected?”

So speaking, she went on to urge old goody Liu to get down and betake herself to the front.

“With a figure like this of mine,” old goody Liu demurred, “how could I very well appear before her? My dear sister-in-law, do tell her that I’ve gone!”

“Get on! Be quick!” P’ing Erh speedily cried. “What does it matter? Our old lady has the highest regard for old people and the greatest pity for the needy! She’s not one you could compare with those haughty and overbearing people! But I fancy you’re a little too timid, so I’ll accompany you as far as there, along with Mrs. Chou.”

While tendering her services, she and Chou Jui's wife led off old goody Liu and crossed over to dowager lady Chia's apartments on this side of the mansion. The boy-servants on duty at the second gate stood up when they saw P'ing Erh approach. But two of them also ran up to her, and, keeping close to her heels: "Miss!" they shouted out. "Miss!"

"What have you again got to say?" P'ing Erh asked.

"It's pretty late just now," one of the boys smilingly remarked; "and mother is ill and wants me to go and call the doctor, so I would, dear Miss, like to have half a day's leave; may I?"

"Your doings are really fine!" P'ing Erh exclaimed. "You've agreed among yourselves that each day one of you should apply for furlough; but instead of speaking to your lady, you come and bother me! The other day that Chu Erh went, Mr. Secundus happened not to want him, so I assented, though I also added that I was doing it as a favour; but here you too come to-day!"

"It's quite true that his mother is sick," Chou Jui's wife interceded; "so, Miss, do say yes to him also, and let him go!"

"Be back as soon as it dawns tomorrow!" P'ing Erh enjoined. "Wait, I've got something for you to do, for you'll again sleep away, and only turn up after the sun has blazed away on your buttocks. As you go now, give a message to Wang Erh! Tell him that our lady bade you warn him that if he does not hand over the balance of the interest due by tomorrow, she won't have anything to do with him. So he'd better let her have it to meet her requirements and finish."

The servant-lad felt in high glee and exuberant spirits. Expressing his obedience, he walked off.

P'ing Erh and her companions repaired then to old lady Chia's apartments. Here the various young ladies from the Garden of Broad Vista were at the time assembled paying their respects to their grandmother. As soon as old goody Liu put her foot inside, she saw the room thronged with girls (as seductive) as twigs of flowers waving to and fro, and so richly dressed, as to look enveloped in pearls, and encircled with kingfisher ornaments. But she could not make out who they all were. Her gaze was, however, attracted by an old dame, reclining alone on a divan. Behind her sat a girl, a regular beauty, clothed in gauze, engaged in patting her legs. Lady Feng was on her feet in the act of cracking some joke.

Old goody Liu readily concluded that it must be dowager lady Chia, so promptly pressing forward, she put on a forced smile and made several curtseys. “My obeisance to you, star of longevity!” she said.

Old lady Chia hastened, on her part, to bow and to inquire after her health. Then she asked Chou Jui’s wife to bring a chair over for her to take a seat. But Pan Erh was still so very shy that he did not know how to make his obeisance.

“Venerable relative,” dowager lady Chia asked, “how old are you this year?”

Old goody Liu immediately rose to her feet. “I’m seventy-five this year,” she rejoined.

“So old and yet so hardy!” Old lady Chia remarked, addressing herself to the party. “Why she’s older than myself by several years! When I reach that age, I wonder whether I shall be able to move!”

“We people have,” old goody Liu smilingly resumed, “to put up, from the moment we come into the world, with ever so many hardships; while your venerable ladyship enjoys, from your birth, every kind of blessing! Were we also like this, there’d be no one to carry on that farming work.”

“Are your eyes and teeth still good?” Dowager lady Chia went on to inquire.

“They’re both still all right,” old goody Liu replied. “The left molars, however, have got rather shaky this year.”

“As for me, I’m quite an old fossil,” dowager lady Chia observed. “I’m no good whatever. My eyesight is dim; my ears are deaf, my memory is gone. I can’t even recollect any of you, old family connections. When therefore any of our relations come on a visit, I don’t see them for fear lest I should be ridiculed. All I can manage to eat are a few mouthfuls of anything tender enough for my teeth; and I can just dose a bit or, when I feel in low spirits, I distract myself a little with these grandsons and granddaughters of mine; that’s all I’m good for.”

“This is indeed your venerable ladyship’s good fortune!” old goody Liu smiled. “We couldn’t enjoy anything of the kind, much though we may long for it.”

“What good fortune!” dowager lady Chia exclaimed. “I’m a useless old thing, no more.”

This remark made every one explode into laughter.

Dowager lady Chia also laughed. “I heard our lady Feng say a little while back,” she added, “that you had brought a lot of squash and vegetables, and I told her to put them by at once. I had just been craving to have newly-grown melons and vegetables; but those one buys outside are not as luscious as those produced in your farms.”

“This is the rustic notion,” old goody Liu laughed, “to entirely subsist on fresh things! Yet, we long to have fish and meat for our fare, but we can’t afford it.”

“I’ve found a relative in you to-day,” dowager lady Chia said, “so you shouldn’t go empty-handed! If you don’t despise this place as too mean, do stay a day or two before you start! We’ve also got a garden here; and this garden produces fruits too; you can taste some of them tomorrow and take a few along with you home, in order to make it look like a visit to relatives.”

When lady Feng saw how delighted old lady Chia was with the prospects of the old dame’s stay, she too lost no time in doing all she could to induce her to remain. “Our place here,” she urged, “isn’t, it’s true, as spacious as your threshing-floor; but as we’ve got two vacant rooms, you’d better put up in them for a couple of days, and choose some of your village news and old stories and recount them to our worthy senior.”

“Now you, vixen Feng,” smiled dowager lady Chia, “don’t raise a laugh at her expense! She’s only a country woman; and will an old dame like her stand any chaff from you?”

While remonstrating with her, she bade a servant go, before attending to anything else, and pluck a few fruits. These she handed to Pan Erh to eat. But Pan Erh did not venture to touch them, conscious as he was of the presence of such a number of bystanders. So old lady Chia gave orders that a few cash should be given him, and then directed the pages to take him outside to play.

After sipping a cup of tea, old goody Liu began to relate, for the benefit of dowager lady Chia, a few of the occurrences she had seen or heard of in the country. These had the effect of putting old lady Chia in a more exuberant frame of mind. But in the midst of her narration, a servant, at lady Feng’s instance, asked goody Liu to go and have her evening meal. Dowager lady Chia then picked out, as well, several kinds of eatables from her own repast, and charged

some one to take them to goody Liu to feast on.

But the consciousness that the old dame had taken her senior's fancy induced lady Feng to send her back again as soon as she had taken some refreshments. On her arrival, Yüan Yang hastily deputed a matron to take goody Liu to have a bath. She herself then went and selected two pieces of ordinary clothes, and these she entrusted to a servant to hand to the old dame to change. Goody Liu had hitherto not set eyes upon any such grand things, so with eagerness she effected the necessary alterations in her costume. This over, she made her appearance outside, and, sitting in front of the divan occupied by dowager lady Chia, she went on to narrate as many stories as she could recall to mind. Pao-yü and his cousins too were, at the time, assembled in the room, and as they had never before heard anything the like of what she said, they, of course, thought her tales more full of zest than those related by itinerant blind storytellers.

Old goody Liu was, albeit a rustic person, gifted by nature with a good deal of discrimination. She was besides advanced in years; and had gone through many experiences in her lifetime, so when she, in the first place, saw how extremely delighted old lady Chia was with her, and, in the second, how eager the whole crowd of young lads and lasses were to listen to what fell from her mouth, she even invented, when she found her own stock exhausted, a good many yarns to recount to them.

"What with all the sowing we have to do in our fields and the vegetables we have to plant," she consequently proceeded, "have we ever in our village any leisure to sit with lazy hands from year to year and day to day; no matter whether it's spring, summer, autumn or winter, whether it blows or whether it rains? Yea, day after day all that we can do is to turn the bare road into a kind of pavilion to rest and cool ourselves on! But what strange things don't we see! Last winter, for instance, snow fell for several consecutive days, and it piled up on the ground three or four feet deep. One day, I got up early, but I hadn't as yet gone out of the door of our house when I heard outside the noise of firewood (being moved). I fancied that some one must have come to steal it, so I crept up to a hole in the window; but, lo, I discovered that it was no one from our own village."

"It must have been," interposed dowager lady Chia, "some wayfarers, who being smitten with the cold, took some of the firewood, they saw ready at hand, to go and make a fire and warm themselves with! That's highly probable!"

“It was no wayfarers at all,” old goody Liu retorted smiling, “and that’s what makes the story so strange. Who do you think it was, venerable star of longevity? It was really a most handsome girl of seventeen or eighteen, whose hair was combed as smooth as if oil had been poured over it. She was dressed in a deep red jacket, a white silk petticoat….”

When she reached this part of her narrative, suddenly became audible the voices of people bawling outside. “It’s nothing much,” they shouted, “don’t frighten our old mistress!” Dowager lady Chia and the other inmates caught, however, their cries and hurriedly inquired what had happened. A servant-maid explained in reply that a fire had broken out in the stables in the southern court, but that there was no danger, as the flames had been suppressed.

Their old grandmother was a person with very little nerve. The moment, therefore, the report fell on her car, she jumped up with all despatch, and leaning on one of the family, she rushed on to the verandah to ascertain the state of things. At the sight of the still brilliant light, shed by the flames, on the south east part of the compound, old lady Chia was plunged in consternation, and invoking Buddha, she went on to shout to the servants to go and burn incense before the god of fire.

Madame Wang and the rest of the members of the household lost no time in crossing over in a body to see how she was getting on. “The fire has been already extinguished,” they too assured her, “please, dear ancestor, repair into your rooms!”

But it was only after old lady Chia had seen the light of the flames entirely subside that she at length led the whole company indoors. “What was that girl up to, taking the firewood in that heavy fall of snow?” Pao-yü thereupon vehemently inquired of goody Liu. “What, if she had got frostbitten and fallen ill?”

“It was the reference made recently to the firewood that was being abstracted,” his grandmother Chia said, “that brought about this fire; and do you still go on asking more about it? Leave this story alone, and tell us something else!”

Hearing this reminder, Pao-yü felt constrained to drop the subject, much against his wishes, and old goody Liu forthwith thought of something else to tell them.

“In our village,” she resumed, “and on the eastern side of our farmstead, there

lives an old dame, whose age is this year, over ninety. She goes in daily for fasting, and worshipping Buddha. Who'd have thought it, she so moved the pity of the goddess of mercy that she gave her this message in a dream: 'It was at one time ordained that you should have no posterity, but as you have proved so devout, I have now memorialised the Pearly Emperor to grant you a grandson!' The fact is, this old dame had one son. This son had had too an only son; but he died after they had with great difficulty managed to rear him to the age of seventeen or eighteen. And what tears didn't they shed for him! But, in course of time, another son was actually born to him. He is this year just thirteen or fourteen, resembles a very ball of flower, (so plump is he), and is clever and sharp to an exceptional degree! So this is indeed a clear proof that those spirits and gods do exist!"

This long tirade proved to be in harmony with dowager lady Chia's and Madame Wang's secret convictions on the subject. Even Madame Wang therefore listened to every word with all profound attention. Pao-yü, however, was so preoccupied with the story about the stolen firewood that he fell in a brown study and gave way to conjectures.

"Yesterday," T'an Ch'un at this point remarked, "We put cousin Shih to a lot of trouble and inconvenience, so, when we get back, we must consult about convening a meeting, and, while returning her entertainment, we can also invite our venerable ancestor to come and admire the chrysanthemums; what do you think of this?"

"Our worthy senior," smiled Pao-yü, "has intimated that she means to give a banquet to return cousin Shih's hospitality, and to ask us to do the honours. Let's wait therefore until we partake of grandmother's collation, before we issue our own invitations; there will be ample time then to do so."

"The later it gets, the cooler the weather becomes," T'an Ch'un observed, "and our dear senior is not likely to enjoy herself."

"Grandmother," added Pao-yü, "is also fond of rain and snow, so wouldn't it be as well to wait until the first fall, and then ask her to come and look at the snow. This will be better, won't it? And were we to recite our verses with snow about us, it will be ever so much more fun!"

"To hum verses in the snow," Lin Tai-yü speedily demurred with a smile,

“won’t, in my idea, be half as nice as building up a heap of firewood and then stealing it, with the flakes playing about us. This will be by far more enjoyable!”

This proposal made Pao-ch’ai and the others laugh. Pao-yü cast a glance at her but made no reply.

But, in a short time, the company broke up. Pao-yü eventually gave old goody Liu a tug on the sly and plied her with minute questions as to who the girl was. The old dame was placed under the necessity of fabricating something for his benefit. “The truth is,” she said, “that there stands on the north bank of the ditch in our village a small ancestral hall, in which offerings are made, but not to spirits or gods. There was in former days some official or other…”

“While speaking, she went on to try and recollect his name and surname.

“No matter about names or surnames!” Pao-yü expostulated. “There’s no need for you to recall them to memory! Just mention the facts; they’ll be enough.”

“This official,” old goody Liu resumed, “had no son. His offspring consisted of one young daughter, who went under the name of Jo Yü, (like Jade). She could read and write, and was doated upon by this official and his consort, just as if she were a precious jewel. But, unfortunately, when this young lady, Jo Yü, grew up to be seventeen, she contracted some disease and died.”

When these words fell on Pao-yü‘s ears, he stamped his foot and heaved a sigh. “What happened after that?” he then asked.

Old goody Liu pursued her story.

“So incessantly,” she continued, “did this official and his consort think of their child that they raised this ancestral hall, erected a clay image of their young daughter Jo Yü in it, and appointed some one to burn incense and trim the fires. But so many days and years have now elapsed that the people themselves are no more alive, the temple is in decay, and the image itself is become a spirit.”

“It hasn’t become a spirit,” remonstrated Pao-yü with vehemence. “Human beings of this kind may, the rule is, die, yet they are not dead.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” ejaculated old goody Liu; “is it really so! Had you, sir, not enlightened us, we would have remained under the impression that she had

become a spirit! But she repeatedly transforms herself into a human being, and there she roams about in every village, farmstead, inn and roadside. And the one I mentioned just now as having taken the firewood is that very girl! The villagers in our place are still consulting with the idea of breaking this clay image and razing the temple to the ground."

"Be quick and dissuade them!" eagerly exclaimed Pao-yü. "Were they to raze the temple to the ground, their crime won't be small."

"It's lucky that you told me, Sir," old goody Liu added. "When I get back tomorrow, I'll make them relinquish the idea and finish!"

"Our venerable senior and my mother," Pao-yü pursued, "are both charitable persons. In fact, all the inmates of our family, whether old or young, do, in like manner, delight in good deeds, and take pleasure in distributing alms. Their greatest relish is to repair temples, and to put up images to the spirits; so tomorrow, I'll make a subscription and collect a few donations for you, and you can then act as incense-burner. When sufficient money has been raised, this fane can be repaired, and another clay image put up; and month by month I'll give you incense and fire money to enable you to burn joss-sticks; won't this be A good thing for you?"

"In that case," old goody Liu rejoined, "I shall, thanks to that young lady's good fortune, have also a few cash to spend."

Pao-yü thereupon likewise wanted to know what the name of the place was, the name of the village, how far it was there and back, and whereabout the temple was situated.

Old goody Liu replied to his questions, by telling him every idle thought that came first to her lips. Pao-yü, however, credited the information she gave him and, on his return to his rooms, he exercised, the whole night, his mind with building castles in the air.

On the morrow, as soon as daylight dawned, he speedily stepped out of his room, and, handing Pei Ming several hundreds of cash, he bade him proceed first in the direction and to the place specified by old goody Liu, and clearly ascertain every detail, so as to enable him, on his return from his errand, to arrive at a suitable decision to carry out his purpose. After Pei Ming's departure, Pao-yü continued on pins on needles and on the tiptoe of expectation. Into such a pitch of

excitement did he work himself, that he felt like an ant in a burning pan. With suppressed impatience, he waited and waited until sunset. At last then he perceived Pei Ming walk in, in high glee.

“Have you discovered the place?” hastily inquired Pao-yü.

“Master,” Pei Ming laughed, “you didn’t catch distinctly the directions given you, and you made me search in a nice way! The name of the place and the bearings can’t be those you gave me, Sir; that is why I’ve had to hunt about the whole day long! I prosecuted my inquiries up to the very ditch on the north east side, before I eventually found a ruined temple.”

Upon hearing the result of his researches, Pao-yü was much gratified. His very eyebrows distended. His eyes laughed. “Old goody Liu,” he said with eagerness, “is a person well up in years, and she may at the moment have remembered wrong; it’s very likely she did. But recount to me what you saw.”

“The door of that temple,” Pei Ming explained, “really faces south, and is all in a tumble-down condition. I searched and searched till I was driven to utter despair. As soon, however, as I caught sight of it, ‘that’s right,’ I shouted, and promptly walked in. But I at once discovered a clay figure, which gave me such a fearful start, that I scampered out again; for it looked as much alive as if it were a real living being.”

Pao-yü smiled full of joy. “It can metamorphose itself into a human being,” he observed, “so, of course, it has more or less a lifelike appearance.”

“Was it ever a girl?” Pei Ming rejoined clapping his hands. “Why it was, in fact, no more than a green-faced and red-haired god of plagues.”

Pao-yü, at this answer, spat at him contemptuously. “You are, in very truth, a useless fool!” he cried. “Haven’t you even enough gumption for such a trifling job as this?”

“What book, I wonder, have you again been reading, master?” Pei Ming continued. “Or you may, perhaps, have heard some one prattle a lot of trash and believed it as true! You send me on this sort of wild goose chase and make me go and knock my head about, and how can you ever say that I’m good for nothing?”

Pao-yü did not fail to notice that he was in a state of exasperation so he lost no time in trying to calm him. “Don’t be impatient!” he urged. “You can go again some other day, when you’ve got nothing to attend to, and institute further inquiries! If it turns out that she has hoodwinked us, why, there will, naturally, be no such thing. But if, verily, there is, won’t you also lay up for yourself a store of good deeds? I shall feel it my duty to reward you in a most handsome manner.”

As he spoke, he espied a servant-lad, on service at the second gate, approach and report to him: “The young ladies in our venerable ladyship’s apartments are standing at the threshold of the second gate and looking out for you, Mr. Secundus.”

But as, reader, you are not aware what they were on the lookout to tell him, the subsequent chapter will explain it for you.

CHAPTER XL.

The venerable lady Shih attends a second banquet in the garden of Broad Vista. Chin Yüan-yang three times promulgates, by means of dominoes, the order to quote passages from old writers.

As soon as Pao-yü, we will now explain, heard what the lad told him, he rushed with eagerness inside. When he came to look about him, he discovered Hu Po standing in front of the screen. “Be quick and go,” she urged. “They’re waiting to speak to you.”

Pao-yü wended his way into the drawing rooms. Here he found dowager lady Chia, consulting with Madame Wang and the whole body of young ladies, about the return feast to be given to Shih Hsiang-yün.

“I’ve got a plan to suggest,” he consequently interposed. “As there are to be no outside guests, the eatables too should not be limited to any kind or number. A few of such dishes, as have ever been to the liking of any of us, should be fixed upon and prepared for the occasion. Neither should any banquet be spread, but a high teapoy can be placed in front of each, with one or two things to suit our particular tastes. Besides, a painted box with partitions and a decanter. Won’t this

be an original way?”

“Capital!” shouted old lady Chia. “Go and tell the people in the cook house,” she forthwith ordered a servant, “to get ready tomorrow such dishes as we relish, and to put them in as many boxes as there will be people, and bring them over. We can have breakfast too in the garden.”

But while they were deliberating, the time came to light the lamps. Nothing of any note transpired the whole night. The next day, they got up at early dawn. The weather, fortunately, was beautifully clear. Li Wan turned out of bed at daybreak. She was engaged in watching the old matrons and servant-girls sweeping the fallen leaves, rubbing the tables and chairs, and preparing the tea and wine vessels, when she perceived Feng Erh usher in old goody Liu and Pan Erh. “You’re very busy, our senior lady!” they said.

“I told you that you wouldn’t manage to start yesterday,” Li Wan smiled, “but you were in a hurry to get away.”

“Your worthy old lady,” goody Liu replied laughingly, “wouldn’t let me go. She wanted me to enjoy myself too for a day before I went.”

Feng Erh then produced several large and small keys. “Our mistress Lien says,” she remarked, “that she fears that the high teapoys which are out are not enough, and she thinks it would be as well to open the loft and take out those that are put away and use them for a day. Our lady should really have come and seen to it in person, but as she has something to tell Madame Wang, she begs your ladyship to open the place, and get a few servants to bring them out.”

Li Wan there and then told Su Yün to take the keys. She also bade a matron go out and call a few servant-boys from those on duty at the second gate. When they came, Li Wan remained in the lower story of the Ta Kuan loft, and looking up, she ordered the servants to go and open the Cho Chin hall and to bring the teapoys one by one. The young servant-lads, matrons and servant-maids then set to work, in a body, and carried down over twenty of them.

“Be careful with them,” shouted Li Wan. “Don’t be bustling about just as if you were being pursued by ghosts! Mind you don’t break the tenons!” Turning her head round, “old dame,” she observed, addressing herself smilingly to goody Liu, “go upstairs too and have a look!”

Old goody Liu was longing to satisfy her curiosity, so at the bare mention of the permission, she uttered just one word (“come”) and, dragging Pan Erh along, she trudged up the stairs. On her arrival inside, she espied, pile upon pile, a whole heap of screens, tables and chairs, painted lanterns of different sizes, and other similar articles. She could not, it is true, make out the use of the various things, but, at the sight of so many colours, of such finery and of the unusual beauty of each article, she muttered time after time the name of Buddha, and then forthwith wended her way downstairs. Subsequently (the servants) locked the doors and every one of them came down.

“I fancy,” cried Li Wan, “that our dowager lady will feel disposed (to go on the water), so you’d better also get the poles, oars and awnings for the boats and keep them in readiness.”

The servants expressed their obedience. Once more they unlocked the doors, and carried down everything required. She then bade a lad notify the boatwomen go to the dock and punt out two boats. But while all this bustle was going on, they discovered that dowager lady Chia had already arrived at the head of a whole company of people. Li Wan promptly went up to greet them.

“Dear venerable senior,” she smiled, “you must be in good spirits to have come in here! Imagining that you hadn’t as yet combed your hair, I just plucked a few chrysanthemums, meaning to send them to you.”

While she spoke, Pi Yüeh at once presented to her a jadite tray, of the size of a lotus leaf, containing twigs cut from every species of chrysanthemum. Old lady Chia selected a cluster of deep red and pinned it in her hair about her temples. But turning round, she noticed old goody Liu. “Come over here,” she vehemently cried with a smile; “and put on a few flowers.”

Scarcely was this remark concluded, than lady Feng dragged goody Liu forward. “Let me deck you up!” she laughed. With these words, she seized a whole plateful of flowers and stuck them three this way, four that way, all over her head. Old lady Chia, and the whole party were greatly amused; so much so, that they could not check themselves.

“I wonder,” shouted goody Liu smiling, “what blessings I have brought upon my head that such honours are conferred upon it to-day!”

“Don’t you yet pull them away,” they all laughed, “and chuck them in her face!

She has got you up in such a way as to make a regular old elf of you!”

“I’m an old hag, I admit,” goody Liu pursued with a laugh; “but when I was young, I too was pretty and fond of flowers and powder! But the best thing I can do now is to keep to such fineries as befit my advanced age!”

While they bandied words, they reached the Hsin Fang pavilion. The waiting maids brought a large embroidered rug and spread it over the planks of the divan near the balustrade. On this rug dowager lady Chia sat, with her back leaning against the railing; and, inviting goody Liu to also take a seat next to her, “Is this garden nice or not?” she asked her.

Old goody Liu invoked Buddha several times. “We country-people,” she rejoined, “do invariably come, at the close of each year, into the city and buy pictures and stick them about. And frequently do we find ourselves in our leisure moments wondering how we too could manage to get into the pictures, and walk about the scenes they represent. I presumed that those pictures were purely and simply fictitious, for how could there be any such places in reality? But, contrary to my expectations, I found, as soon as I entered this garden to-day and had a look about it, that it was, after all, a hundred times better than these very pictures. But if only I could get some one to make me a sketch of this garden, to take home with me and let them see it, so that when we die we may have reaped some benefit!”

Upon catching the wish she expressed, dowager lady Chia pointed at Hsi Ch’un. “Look at that young granddaughter of mine!” she smiled. “She’s got the knack of drawing. So what do you say to my asking her tomorrow to make a picture for you?”

This suggestion filled goody Liu with enthusiasm and speedily crossing over, she clasped Hsi Ch’un in her arms. “My dear Miss!” she cried, “so young in years, and yet so pretty, and so accomplished too! Mightn’t you be a spirit come to life!”

After old lady Chia had had a little rest, she in person took goody Liu and showed her everything there was to be seen. First, they visited the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. The moment they stepped into the entrance, a narrow avenue, flanked on either side with kingfisherlike green bamboos, met their gaze. The earth below was turfed all over with moss. In the centre, extended a tortuous road, paved

with pebbles. Goody Liu left dowager lady Chia and the party walk on the raised road, while she herself stepped on the earth. But Hu Po tugged at her. “Come up, old dame, and walk here!” she exclaimed. “Mind the fresh moss is slippery and you might fall.”

“I don’t mind it!” answered goody Liu. “We people are accustomed to walking (on such slippery things)! So, young ladies, please proceed. And do look after your embroidered shoes! Don’t splash them with mud.”

But while bent upon talking with those who kept on the raised road, she unawares reached a spot, which was actually slippery, and with a sound of “ku tang” she tumbled over.

The whole company clapped their hands and laughed boisterously.

“You young wenches,” shouted out dowager lady Chia, “don’t you yet raise her up, but stand by giggling?”

This reprimand was still being uttered when goody Liu had already crawled up. She too was highly amused. “Just as my mouth was bragging,” she observed, “I got a whack on the lips!”

“Have you perchance twisted your waist?” inquired old lady Chia. “Tell the servant-girls to pat it for you!”

“What an idea!” retorted goody Liu, “am I so delicate? What day ever goes by without my tumbling down a couple of times? And if I had to be patted every time wouldn’t it be dreadful!”

Tzu Chuan had at an early period raised the speckled bamboo portiere. Dowager lady Chia and her companions entered and seated themselves. Lin Tai-yü with her own hands took a small tray and came to present a covered cup of tea to her grandmother.

“We won’t have any tea!” Madame Wang interposed, “so, miss, you needn’t pour any.”

Lin Tai-yü, hearing this, bade a waiting-maid fetch the chair from under the window where she herself often sat, and moving it to the lower side, she pressed Madame Wang into it. But goody Liu caught sight of the pencils and inkslabs,

lying on the table placed next to the window, and espied the bookcase piled up to the utmost with books. “This must surely,” the old dame ejaculated, “be some young gentleman’s study!”

“This is the room of this granddaughter-in-law of mine,” dowager lady Chia explained, smilingly pointing to Tai-yü.

Goody Liu scrutinised Lin Tai-yü with intentness for a while. “Is this anything like a young lady’s private room?” she then observed with a smile. “Why, in very deed, it’s superior to any first class library!”

“How is it I don’t see Pao-yü?” his grandmother Chia went on to inquire.

“He’s in the boat, on the pond,” the waiting-maids, with one voice, returned for answer.

“Who also got the boats ready?” old lady Chia asked.

“The loft was open just now so they were taken out,” Li Wan said, “and as I thought that you might, venerable senior, feel inclined to have a row, I got everything ready.”

After listening to this explanation, dowager lady Chia was about to pass some remark, but some one came and reported to her that Mrs. Hsüeh had arrived. No sooner had old lady Chia and the others sprung to their feet than they noticed that Mrs. Hsüeh had already made her appearance. While taking a seat: “Your venerable ladyship,” she smiled, “must be in capital spirits to-day to have come at this early hour!”

“It’s only this very minute that I proposed that any one who came late, should be fined,” dowager lady Chia laughed, “and, who’d have thought it, here you, Mrs. Hsüeh, arrive late!”

After they had indulged in good-humoured raillery for a time, old lady Chia’s attention was attracted by the faded colour of the gauze on the windows, and she addressed herself to Madame Wang. “This gauze,” she said, “may have been nice enough when it was newly pasted, but after a time nothing remained of kingfisher green. In this court too there are no peach or apricot trees and these bamboos already are green in themselves, so were this shade of green gauze to be put up again, it would, instead of improving matters, not harmonise with the

surroundings. I remember that we had at one time four or five kinds of coloured gauzes for sticking on windows, so give her some tomorrow to change that on there."

"When I opened the store yesterday," hastily put in Lady Feng, "I noticed that there were still in those boxes, made of large planks, several rolls of 'cicada wing' gauze of silvery red colour. There were also several rolls with designs of twigs of flowers of every kind, several with 'the rolling clouds and bats' pattern, and several with figures representing hundreds of butterflies, interspersed among flowers. The colours of all these were fresh, and the gauze supple. But I failed to see anything of the kind you speak of. Were two rolls taken (from those I referred to), and a couple of bed-covers of embroidered gauze made out of them, they would, I fancy, be a pretty sight!"

"Pshaw!" laughed old lady Chia, "every one says that there's nothing you haven't gone through and nothing you haven't seen, and don't you even know what this gauze is? Will you again brag by and bye, after this?"

Mrs. Hsüeh and all the others smiled. "She may have gone through a good deal," they remarked, "but how can she ever presume to pit herself against an old lady like you? So why don't you, venerable senior, tell her what it is so that we too may be edified."

Lady Feng too gave a smile. "My dear ancestor," she pleaded, "do tell me what it is like."

Dowager lady Chia thereupon proceeded to enlighten Mrs. Hsüeh and the whole company. "That gauze is older in years than any one of you," she said. "It isn't therefore to be wondered, if you make a mistake and take it for 'cicada wing' gauze. But it really bears some resemblance to it; so much so, indeed, that any one, not knowing the difference, would imagine it to be the 'cicada wing' gauze. Its true name, however, is 'soft smoke' silk."

"This is also a nice sounding name," lady Feng agreed. "But up to the age I've reached, I have never heard of any such designation, in spite of the many hundreds of specimens of gauzes and silks, I've seen."

"How long can you have lived?" old lady Chia added smilingly, "and how many kinds of things can you have met, that you indulge in this tall talk? Of this 'soft smoke' silk, there only exist four kinds of colours. The one is red-blue; the other

is russet; the other pine-green; the other silvery-red; and it's because, when made into curtains or stuck on window-frames, it looks from far like smoke or mist, that it is called 'soft smoke' silk. The silvery-red is also called 'russet shadow' gauze. Among the gauzes used in the present day, in the palace above, there are none so supple and rich, light and closely-woven as this!"

"Not to speak of that girl Feng not having seen it," Mrs. Hsüeh laughed, "why, even I have never so much as heard anything of it."

While the conversation proceeded in this strain, lady Feng soon directed a servant to fetch a roll. "Now isn't this the kind!" dowager lady Chia exclaimed. "At first, we simply had it stuck on the window frames, but we subsequently used it for covers and curtains, just for a trial, and really they were splendid! So you had better tomorrow try and find several rolls, and take some of the silvery-red one and have it fixed on the windows for her."

While lady Feng promised to attend to her commission, the party scrutinised it, and unanimously extolled it with effusion. Old goody Liu too strained her eyes and examined it, and her lips incessantly muttered Buddha's name. "We couldn't," she ventured, "afford to make clothes of such stuff, much though we may long to do so; and won't it be a pity to use it for sticking on windows?"

"But it doesn't, after all, look well, when made into clothes," old lady Chia explained.

Lady Feng hastily pulled out the lapel of the deep-red brocaded gauze jacket she had on, and, facing dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh, "Look at this jacket of mine," she remarked.

"This is also of first-rate quality!" old lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined. "This is nowadays made in the palace for imperial use, but it can't possibly come up to this!"

"It's such thin stuff," lady Feng observed, "and do you still say that it was made in the palace for imperial use? Why, it doesn't, in fact, compare favourably with even this, which is worn by officials!"

"You'd better search again!" old lady Chia urged; "I believe there must be more of it! If there be, bring it all out, and give this old relative Liu a couple of rolls! Should there be any red-blue, I'll make a curtain to hang up. What remains can

be matched with some lining, and cut into a few double waistcoats for the waiting-maids to wear. It would be sheer waste to keep these things, as they will be spoilt by the damp."

Lady Feng vehemently acquiesced; after which, she told a servant to take the gauze away.

"These rooms are so small!" dowager lady Chia then observed, smiling. "We had better go elsewhere for a stroll."

"Every one says," old goody Liu put in, "that big people live in big houses! When I saw yesterday your main apartments, dowager lady, with all those large boxes, immense presses, big tables, and spacious beds to match, they did, indeed, present an imposing sight! Those presses are larger than our whole house; yea loftier too! But strange to say there were ladders in the back court. 'They don't also,' I thought, 'go up to the house tops to sun things, so what can they keep those ladders in readiness for?' Well, after that, I remembered that they must be required for opening the presses to take out or put in things. And that without those ladders, how could one ever reach that height? But now that I've also seen these small rooms, more luxuriously got up than the large ones, and full of various articles, all so fascinating and hardly even known to me by name, I feel, the more I feast my eyes on them, the more unable to tear myself away from them."

"There are other things still better than this," lady Feng added. "I'll take you to see them all!"

Saying this, they straightway left the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. From a distance, they spied a whole crowd of people punting the boats in the lake.

"As they've got the boats ready," old lady Chia proposed, "we may as well go and have a row in them!"

As she uttered this suggestion, they wended their steps along the persicary-covered bank of the Purple Lily Isle. But before reaching the lake, they perceived several matrons advancing that way with large multicoloured boxes in their hands, made all alike of twisted wire and inlaid with gold. Lady Feng hastened to inquire of Madame Wang where breakfast was to be served.

"Ask our venerable senior," Madame Wang replied, "and let them lay it

wherever she pleases."

Old lady Chia overheard her answer, and turning her head round: "Miss Tertia," she said, "take the servants, and make them lay breakfast wherever you think best! We'll get into the boats from here."

Upon catching her senior's wishes, lady Feng retraced her footsteps, and accompanied by Li Wan, T'an Ch'un, Yüan Yang and Hu Po, she led off the servants, carrying the eatables, and other domestics, and came by the nearest way, to the Ch'iu Shuang library, where they arranged the tables in the Hsiao Ts'ui hall.

"We daily say that whenever the gentlemen outside have anything to drink or eat, they invariably have some one who can raise a laugh and whom they can chaff for fun's sake," Yuan Yang smiled, "so let's also to-day get a female family-companion."

Li Wan, being a person full of kindly feelings, did not fathom the insinuation, though it did not escape her ear. Lady Feng, however, thoroughly understood that she alluded to old goody Liu. "Let us too to-day," she smilingly remarked, "chaff her for a bit of fun!"

These two then began to mature their plans.

Li Wan chided them with a smile. "You people," she said, "don't know even how to perform the least good act! But you're not small children any more, and are you still up to these pranks? Mind, our venerable ancestor might call you to task!"

"That has nothing whatever to do with you, senior lady," Yüan Yang laughed, "it's my own look out!"

These words were still on her lips, when she saw dowager lady Chia and the rest of the company arrive. They each sat where and how they pleased. First and foremost, a waiting-maid brought two trays of tea. After tea, lady Feng laid hold of a napkin, made of foreign cloth, in which were wrapped a handful of blackwood chopsticks, encircled with three rings, of inlaid silver, and distributed them on the tables, in the order in which they were placed.

"Bring that small hard-wood table over," old lady Chia then exclaimed; "and let

our relative Liu sit next to me here!”

No sooner did the servants hear her order than they hurried to move the table to where she wanted it. Lady Feng, during this interval, made a sign with her eye to Yüan Yang. Yüan Yang there and then dragged goody Liu out of the hall and began to impress in a low tone of voice various things on her mind. “This is the custom which prevails in our household,” she proceeded, “and if you disregard it we’ll have a laugh at your expense!”

Having arranged everything she had in view, they at length returned to their places. Mrs. Hsüeh had come over, after her meal, so she simply seated herself on one side and sipped her tea. Dowager lady Chia with Pao-yü, Hsiang-yün, Tai-yü and Pao-ch’ai sat at one table. Madame Wang took the girls, Ying Ch’un, and her sisters, and occupied one table. Old goody Liu took a seat at a table next to dowager lady Chia. Heretofore, while their old mistress had her repast, a young servant-maid usually stood by her to hold the finger bowl, yak-brush, napkin and other such necessaries, but Yüan Yang did not of late fulfil any of these duties, so when, on this occasion, she deliberately seized the yak-brush and came over and flapped it about, the servant-girls concluded that she was bent upon playing some tricks upon goody Liu, and they readily withdrew and let her have her way.

While Yüan Yang attended to her self-imposed duties, she winked at the old dame.

“Miss,” goody Liu exclaimed, “set your mind at ease!” Goody Liu sat down at the table and took up the chopsticks, but so heavy and clumsy did she find them that she could not handle them conveniently. The fact is that lady Feng and Yüan Yang had put their heads together and decided to only assign to goody Liu a pair of antiquated four-cornered ivory chopsticks, inlaid with gold.

“These forks,” shouted goody Liu, after scrutinising them, “are heavier than the very iron-lever over at my place. How ever can I move them about?”

This remark had the effect of making every one explode into a fit of laughter. But a married woman standing in the centre of the room, with a box in her hands, attracted their gaze. A waiting-maid went up to her and removed the cover of the box. Its contents were two bowls of eatables. Li Wan took one of these and placed it on dowager lady Chia’s table, while lady Feng chose the

bowl with pigeon’s eggs and put it on goody Liu’s table.

“Please (commence),” Dowager lady Chia uttered from the near side, where she sat.

Goody Liu at this speedily sprung to her feet. “Old Liu, old Liu,” she roared with a loud voice, “your eating capacity is as big as that of a buffalo! You’ve gorged like an old sow and can’t raise your head up!” Then puffing out her cheeks, she added not a word.

The whole party was at first taken quite aback. But, as soon as they heard the drift of her remarks, every one, both high as well as low, began to laugh boisterously. Hsiang-yün found it so difficult to restrain herself that she spurted out the tea she had in her mouth. Lin Tai-yü indulged in such laughter that she was quite out of breath, and propping herself up on the table, she kept on ejaculating ‘Ai-yo.’ Pao-yü rolled into his grandmother’s lap. The old lady herself was so amused that she clasped Pao-yü in her embrace, and gave way to endearing epithets. Madame Wang laughed, and pointed at lady Feng with her finger; but as for saying a word, she could not. Mrs. Hsüeh had much difficulty in curbing her mirth, and she sputtered the tea, with which her mouth was full, all over T’an Ch’un’s petticoat. T’an Ch’un threw the contents of the teacup, she held in her hand, over Ying Ch’un; while Hsi Ch’un quitted her seat, and, pulling her nurse away, bade her rub her stomach for her.

Below, among the lower seats, there was not one who was not with bent waist and doubled-up back. Some retired to a corner and, squatting down, laughed away. Others suppressed their laughter and came up and changed the clothes of their young mistresses. Lady Feng and Yuan Yang were the only ones, who kept their countenance. Still they continued helping old goody Liu to food.

Old goody Liu took up the chopsticks. “Even the chickens in this place are fine,” she went on to add, pretending, she did not hear what was going on; “the eggs they lay are small, but so dainty! How very pretty they are! Let me help myself to one!”

The company had just managed to check themselves, but, the moment these words fell on their ears, they started again with their laughter. Old lady Chia laughed to such an extent that tears streamed from her eyes. And so little could she bear the strain any longer that Hu Po stood behind her and patted her.

“This must be the work of that vixen Feng!” old lady Chia laughed. “She has ever been up to tricks like a very imp, so be quick and disbelieve all her yarns!”

Goody Liu was in the act of praising the eggs as small yet dainty, when lady Feng interposed with a smile. “They’re one tael each, be quick, and taste them;” she said; “they’re not nice when they get cold!”

Goody Liu forthwith stretched out the chopsticks with the intent of catching one; but how could she manage to do so? They rolled and rolled in the bowl for ever so long; and, it was only after extreme difficulty that she succeeded in shoving one up. Extending her neck forward, she was about to put it in her mouth, when it slipped down again, and rolled on to the floor. She hastily banged down the chopsticks, and was going herself to pick it up, when a servant, who stood below, got hold of it and took it out of the room.

Old goody Liu heaved a sigh. “A tael!” she soliloquised, “and here it goes without a sound!”

Every one had long ago abandoned all idea of eating, and, gazing at her, they enjoyed the fun.

“Who has now brought out these chopsticks again?” old lady Chia went on to ask. “We haven’t invited any strangers or spread any large banquet! It must be that vixen Feng who gave them out! But don’t you yet change them!”

The servants, standing on the floor below, had indeed had no hand in getting those ivory chopsticks; they had, in fact, been brought by lady Feng and Yüan Yang; but when they heard these remarks, they hurried to put them away and to change them for a pair similar to those used by the others, made of blackwood inlaid with silver.

“They’ve taken away the gold ones,” old goody Liu shouted, “and here come silver ones! But, after all, they’re not as handy as those we use!”

“Should there be any poison in the viands,” lady Feng observed, “you can detect it, as soon as this silver is dipped into them!”

“If there’s poison in such viands as these,” old goody Liu added, “why those of ours must be all arsenic! But though it be the death of me, I’ll swallow every morsel!”

Seeing how amusing the old woman was and with what relish she devoured her food, dowager lady Chia took her own dishes and passed them over to her.

She then likewise bade an old matron take various viands and put them in a bowl for Pan Erh. But presently, the repast was concluded, and old lady Chia and all the other inmates adjoined into T'an Ch'un's bedroom for a chat.

The remnants were, meanwhile, cleared away, and fresh tables were laid.

Old goody Liu watched Li Wan and lady Feng sit opposite each other and eat. "Putting everything else aside," she sighed, "what most takes my fancy is the way things are done in your mansion. It isn't to be wondered at that the adage has it that: 'propriety originates from great families.'"

"Don't be too touchy," lady Feng hastily smiled, "we all made fun of you just now."

But barely had she done speaking, when Yüan Yang too walked in. "Old goody Liu," she said laughingly, "don't be angry! I tender you my apologies, venerable dame!"

"What are you saying, Miss?" old goody Liu rejoined smiling. "We've coaxed our dowager lady to get a little distraction; and what reason is there to be angry? From the very first moment you spoke to me, I knew at once that it was intended to afford merriment to you all! Had I been angry at heart, I wouldn't have gone so far as to say what I did!"

Yüan Yang then blew up the servants. "Why," she shouted, "don't you pour a cup of tea for the old dame?"

"That sister-in-law," promptly explained old goody Liu, "gave me a cup a little while back. I've had it already. But you, Miss, must also have something to eat."

Lady Feng dragged Yüan Yang into a seat. "Have your meal with us!" she said. "You'll thus save another fuss by and bye."

Yüan Yang readily seated herself. The matrons came up and added to the number of bowls and chopsticks, and the trio went through their meal.

"From all I see," smiled goody Liu, "you people eat just a little and finish. It's

lucky you don’t feel the pangs of hunger! But it isn’t astonishing if a whiff of wind can puff you over!”

“A good many eatables remained over to-day. Where are they all gone to?” Yüan Yang inquired.

“They haven’t as yet been apportioned!” the matrons responded. “They’re kept in here until they can be given in a lump to them to eat!”

“They can’t get through so many things!” Yüan Yang resumed. “You had as well therefore choose two bowls and send them over to that girl P’ing, in your mistress Secundus’ rooms.”

“She has had her repast long ago.” lady Feng put in. “There’s no need to give her any!”

“With what she can’t eat, herself,” Yüan Yang continued, “she can feed the cats.”

At these words, a matron lost no time in selecting two sorts of eatables, and, taking the box, she went to take them over.

“Where’s Su Yun gone to?” Yüan Yang asked.

“They’re all in here having their meal together.” Li Wan replied. “What do you want her for again?”

“Well, in that case, never mind,” Yüan Yang answered.

“Hsi Jen isn’t here,” lady Feng observed, “so tell some one to take her a few things!”

Yuan Yang, hearing this, directed a servant to send her also a few eatables. “Have the partition boxes been filled with wine for by and bye?” Yüan Yang went on to ask the matrons.

“They’ll be ready, I think, in a little while,” a matron explained.

“Hurry them up a bit!” Yüan Yang added.

The matron signified her assent.

Lady Feng and her friends then came into T’an Ch’un’s apartments, where they found the ladies chatting and laughing.

T’an Ch’un had ever shown an inclination for plenty of room. Hence that suite of three apartments had never been partitioned. In the centre was placed a large table of rosewood and Ta li marble. On this table, were laid in a heap every kind of copyslips written by persons of note. Several tens of valuable inkslabs and various specimens of tubes and receptacles for pens figured also about; the pens in which were as thickly packed as trees in a forest. On the off side, stood a flower bowl from the ‘Ju’ kiln, as large as a bushel measure. In it was placed, till it was quite full, a bunch of white chrysanthemums, in appearance like crystal balls. In the middle of the west wall, was suspended a large picture representing vapor and rain; the handiwork of Mi Nang-yang. On the left and right of this picture was hung a pair of antithetical scrolls—the autograph of Yen Lü. The lines on these scrolls were:

Wild scenes are to the taste of those who leisure love, And springs and rookeries are their rustic resort.

On the table, figured a large tripod. On the left, stood on a blackwood cabinet, a huge bowl from a renowned government kiln. This bowl contained about ten “Buddha’s hands” of beautiful yellow and fine proportions. On the right, was suspended, on a Japanese-lacquered frame, a white jade sonorous plate. Its shape resembled two eyes, one by the side of the other. Next to it hung a small hammer.

Pan Erh had become a little more confident and was about to seize the hammer and beat the plate, when the waiting-maids hastened to prevent him. Next, he wanted a “Buddha’s hand” to eat. T’an Ch’un chose one and let him have it. “You may play with it,” she said, “but you can’t eat it.”

On the east side stood a sleeping divan. On a movable bed was hung a leek-green gauze curtain, ornamented with double embroideries, representing flowers, plants and insects. Pan Erh ran up to have a look. “This is a green-cicada,” he shouted; “this a grasshopper!”

But old goody Liu promptly gave him a slap. “You mean scamp!” she cried. “What an awful rumpus you’re kicking up! I simply brought you along with me

to look at things; and lo, you put on airs;" and she beat Pan Erh until he burst out crying. It was only after every one quickly combined in using their efforts to solace him that he at length desisted.

Old lady Chia then looked through the gauze casement into the back court for some time. "The dryandra trees by the eaves of the covered passage are growing all right," she remarked. "The only thing is that their foliage is rather sparse."

But while she passed this remark, a sudden gust of wind swept by, and faintly on her ear fell the strains of music. "In whose house is there a wedding?" old lady Chia inquired. "This place must be very near the street!"

"How could one hear what's going on in the street?" Madame Wang and the others smiled. "It's our twelve girls practising on their wind and string instruments!"

"As they're practising," dowager lady Chia eagerly cried, smilingly, "why not ask them to come in here and practise? They'll be able to have a stroll also, while we, on our part, will derive some enjoyment."

Upon hearing this suggestion, lady Feng immediately directed a servant to go out and call them in. She further issued orders to bring a table and spread a red cover over it.

"Let it be put," old lady Chia chimed in, "in the water-pavilion of the Lotus Fragrance Arbour, for (the music) will borrow the ripple of the stream and sound ever so much more pleasant to the ear. We can by and bye drink our wine in the Cho Chin Hall; we'll thus have ample room, and be able to listen from close!"

Every one admitted that the spot was well adapted. Dowager lady Chia turned herself towards Mrs. Hsüeh. "Let's get ahead!" she laughed. "The young ladies don't like any one to come in here, for fear lest their quarters should get contaminated; so don't let us show ourselves disregardful of their wishes! The right thing would be to go and have our wine aboard one of those boats!"

As she spoke, one and all rose to their feet. They were making their way out when T'an Ch'un interposed. "What's this that you're saying?" she smiled. "Please do seat yourselves, venerable senior, and you, Mrs. Hsüeh, and Madame Wang! You can't be going yet?"

“These three girls of mine are really nice! There are only two mistresses that are simply dreadful.” Dowager lady Chia said smilingly. “When we get drunk shortly, we’ll go and sit in their rooms and have a lark!”

These words evoked laughter from every one. In a body they quitted the place. But they had not proceeded far before they reached the bank covered with aquatic plants, to which place the boatwomen, who had been brought from Ku Su, had already punted two crab-wood boats. Into one of these boats, they helped old lady Chia, Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, old goody Liu, Yüan Yang, and Yü Ch’uan-Erh. Last in order Li Wan followed on board. But lady Feng too stepped in, and standing up on the bow, she insisted upon punting.

Dowager lady Chia, however, remonstrated from her seat in the bottom of the boat. “This isn’t a joke,” she cried, “we’re not on the river, it’s true, but there are some very deep places about, so be quick and come in. Do it for my sake.”

“What’s there to be afraid of?” lady Feng laughed. “Compose your mind, worthy ancestor.”

Saying this, the boat was pushed off with one shove. When it reached the middle of the lake, lady Feng became nervous, for the craft was small and the occupants many, and hastily handing the pole to a boatwoman, she squatted down at last.

Ying Ch’un, her sisters, their cousins, as well as Pao-yü subsequently got on board the second boat, and followed in their track; while the rest of the company, consisting of old nurses and a bevy of waiting-maids, kept pace with them along the bank of the stream.

“All these broken lotus leaves are dreadful!” Pao-yü shouted. “Why don’t you yet tell the servants to pull them off?”

“When was this garden left quiet during all the days of this year?” Pao-ch’ai smiled. “Why, people have come, day after day, to visit it, so was there ever any time to tell the servants to come and clean it?”

“I have the greatest abhorrence,” Lin Tai-yü chimed in, “for Li I’s poetical works, but there’s only this line in them which I like:

“‘Leave the dry lotus leaves so as to hear the patter of the rain.’

“and here you people deliberately mean again not to leave the dry lotus stay where they are.”

“This is indeed a fine line!” Pao-yü exclaimed. “We mustn’t hereafter let them pull them away!”

While this conversation continued, they reached the shoaly inlet under the flower-laden beech. They felt a coolness from the shady overgrowth penetrate their very bones. The decaying vegetation and the withered aquatic chestnut plants on the sand-bank enhanced, to a greater degree, the beauty of the autumn scenery.

Dowager lady Chia at this point observed some spotless rooms on the bank, so spick and so span. “Are not these Miss Hsüeh’s quarters,” she asked. “Eh?”

“Yes, they are!” everybody answered.

Old lady Chia promptly bade them go alongside, and wending their way up the marble steps, which seemed to lead to the clouds, they in a body entered the Heng Wu court. Here they felt a peculiar perfume come wafting into their nostrils, for the colder the season got the greener grew that strange vegetation, and those fairylike creepers. The various plants were laden with seeds, which closely resembled red coral beans, as they drooped in lovely clusters.

The house, as soon as they put their foot into it, presented the aspect of a snow cave. There was a total absence of every object of ornament. On the table figured merely an earthenware vase, in which were placed several chrysanthemums. A few books and teacups were also conspicuous, but no further knicknacks. On the bed was suspended a green gauze curtain, and of equally extreme plainness were the coverlets and mattresses belonging to it.

“This child,” dowager lady Chia sighed, “is too simple! If you’ve got nothing to lay about, why not ask your aunt for a few articles? I would never raise any objection. I never thought about them. Your things, of course, have been left at home, and have not been brought over.”

So saying, she told Yuan Yang to go and fetch several bric-a-brac. She next went on to call lady Feng to task.

“She herself wouldn’t have them,” (lady Feng) rejoined. “We really sent over a

few, but she refused every one of them and returned them."

"In her home also," smiled Mrs. Hsüeh, "she does not go in very much for such sort of things."

Old lady Chia nodded her head. "It will never do!" she added. "It does, it's true, save trouble; but were some relative to come on a visit, she'll find things in an impossible way. In the second place, such simplicity in the apartments of young ladies of tender age is quite unpropitious! Why, if you young people go on in this way, we old fogies should go further and live in stables! You've all heard what is said in those books and plays about the dreadful luxury, with which young ladies' quarters are got up. And though these girls of ours could not presume to place themselves on the same footing as those young ladies, they shouldn't nevertheless exceed too much the bounds of what constitutes the right thing. If they have any objects ready at hand, why shouldn't they lay them out? And if they have any strong predilection for simplicity, a few things less will do quite as well. I've always had the greatest knack for titifying a room, but being an old woman now I haven't the ease and inclination to attend to such things! These girls are, however, learning how to do things very nicely. I was afraid that there would be an appearance of vulgarity in what they did, and that, even had they anything worth having, they'd so place them about as to spoil them; but from what I can see there's nothing vulgar about them. But let me now put things right for you, and I'll wager that everything will look grand as well as plain. I've got a couple of my own knicknacks, which I've managed to keep to this day, by not allowing Pao-yü to get a glimpse of them; for had he ever seen them, they too would have long ago disappeared!" Continuing, she called Yüan Yang. "Fetch that marble pot with scenery on it," she said to her; "that gauze screen, and that tripod of transparent stone with black streaks, which you'll find in there, and lay out all three on this table. They'll be ample! Bring likewise those ink pictures and white silk curtains, and change these curtains."

Yüan Yang expressed her obedience. "All these articles have been put away in the eastern loft," she smiled. "In what boxes they've been put, I couldn't tell; I must therefore go and find them quietly and if I bring them over tomorrow, it will be time enough."

"Tomorrow or the day after will do very well; but don't forget, that's all," dowager lady Chia urged.

While conversing, they sat for a while. Presently, they left the rooms and repaired straightway into the Cho Chin hall. Wen Kuan and the other girls came up and paid their obeisance. They next inquired what songs they were to practise.

“You’d better choose a few pieces to rehearse out of those you know best,” old lady Chia rejoined.

Wen Kuan and her companions then withdrew and betook themselves to the Lotus Fragrance Pavilion. But we will leave them there without further allusion to them.

During this while, lady Feng had already, with the help of servants, got everything in perfect order. On the left and right of the side of honour were placed two divans. These divans were completely covered with embroidered covers and fine variegated mats. In front of each divan stood two lacquer teapoys, inlaid, some with designs of crab-apple flowers; others of plum blossom, some of lotus leaves, others of sun-flowers. Some of these teapoys were square, others round. Their shapes were all different. On each was placed a set consisting of a stove and a bottle, also a box with partitions. The two divans and four teapoys, in the place of honour, were used by dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh. The chair and two teapoys in the next best place, by Madame Wang. The rest of the inmates had, all alike, a chair and a teapoy. On the east side sat old goody Liu. Below old goody Liu came Madame Wang. On the west was seated Shih Hsiang-yün. The second place was occupied by Pao-ch’ai; the third by Tai-yü; the fourth by Ying Ch’un. T’an Ch’un and Hsi Ch’un filled the lower seats, in their proper order; Pao-yü sat in the last place. The two teapoys assigned to Li Wan and lady Feng stood within the third line of railings, and beyond the second row of gauze frames. The pattern of the partition-boxes corresponded likewise with the pattern on the teapoys. Each inmate had a black decanter, with silver, inlaid in foreign designs; as well as an ornamented, enamelled cup.

After they had all occupied the seats assigned to them, dowager lady Chia took the initiative and smilingly suggested: “Let’s begin by drinking a couple of cups of wine. But we should also have a game of forfeits to-day, we’ll have plenty of fun then.”

“You, venerable senior, must certainly have a good wine order to impose,” Mrs.

Hsüeh laughingly observed, “but how could we ever comply with it? But if your aim be to intoxicate us, why, we’ll all straightway drink one or two cups more than is good for us and finish!”

“Here’s Mrs. Hsüeh beginning to be modest again to-day!” old lady Chia smiled. “But I expect it’s because she looks down upon me as being an old hag!”

“It isn’t modesty!” Mrs. Hsüeh replied smiling. “It’s all a dread lest I shouldn’t be able to observe the order and thus incur ridicule.”

“If you don’t give the right answer,” Madame Wang promptly interposed with a smile, “you’ll only have to drink a cup or two more of wine, and should we get drunk, we can go to sleep; and who’ll, pray laugh at us?”

Mrs. Hsüeh nodded her head. “I’ll agree to the order,” she laughed, “but, dear senior, you must, after all, do the right thing and have a cup of wine to start it.”

“This is quite natural!” old lady Chia answered laughingly; and with these words, she forthwith emptied a cup.

Lady Feng with hurried steps advanced to the centre of the room. “If we are to play at forfeits,” she smilingly proposed, “we’d better invite sister Yüan Yang to come and join us.”

The whole company was perfectly aware that if dowager lady Chia had to give out the rule of forfeits, Yüan Yang would necessarily have to suggest it, so the moment they heard the proposal they, with common consent, approved it as excellent. Lady Feng therefore there and then dragged Yüan Yang over.

“As you’re to take a part in the game of forfeits,” Madame Wang smilingly observed, “there’s no reason why you should stand up.” And turning her head round, “Bring over,” she bade a young waiting-maid, “a chair and place it at your Mistress Secunda’s table.”

Yüan Yang, half refusing and half assenting, expressed her thanks, and took the seat. After partaking also of a cup of wine, “Drinking rules,” she smiled, “resemble very much martial law; so irrespective of high or low, I alone will preside. Any one therefore who disobeys my words will have to suffer a penalty.”

“Of course, it should be so!” Madame Wang and the others laughed, “so be quick and give out the rule!”

But before Yüan Yang had as yet opened her lips to speak, old goody Liu left the table, and waving her hand: “Don’t,” she said, “make fun of people in this way, for I’ll go home.”

“This will never do!” One and all smilingly protested.

Yüan Yang shouted to the young waiting-maids to drag her back to her table; and the maids, while also indulging in laughter, actually pulled her and compelled her to rejoin the banquet.

“Spare me!” old goody Liu kept on crying, “spare me!”

“Any one who says one word more,” Yüan Yang exclaimed, “will be fined a whole decanter full.”

Old goody Liu then at length observed silence.

“I’ll now give out the set of dominoes.” Yüan Yang proceeded. “I’ll begin from our venerable mistress and follow down in proper order until I come to old goody Liu, when I shall stop. So as to illustrate what I meant just now by giving out a set, I’ll take these three dominoes and place them apart; you have to begin by saying something on the first, next, to allude to the second, and, after finishing with all three, to take the name of the whole set and match it with a line, no matter whether it be from some stanza or roundelay, song or idyl, set phrases or proverbs. But they must rhyme. And any one making a mistake will be mulcted in one cup.”

“This rule is splendid; begin at once!” they all exclaimed.

“I’ve got a set,” Yüan Yang pursued; “on the left, is the piece ‘heaven,’ (twelve dots).”

“Above head stretches the blue heaven,”

dowager lady Chia said.

“Good!” shouted every one.

“In the centre is a five and six,” Yüan Yang resumed.

The fragrance of the plum blossom pierces the bones on the bridge “Six,”

old lady Chia added.

“There now remains,” Yüan Yang explained, “one piece, the six and one.”

“From among the fleecy clouds issues the wheel-like russet sun.”

dowager lady Chia continued.

“The whole combined,” Yuan Yang observed “forms ‘the devil with dishevelled hair.’”

“This devil clasps the leg of the ‘Chung Pa’ devil,”

old lady Chia observed.

At the conclusion of her recitation, they all burst out laughing. “Capital!” they shouted. Old lady Chia drained a cup. Yüan Yang then went on to remark, “I’ve got another set; the one on the left is a double five.”

“Bud after bud of the plum bloom dances in the wind,”

Mrs. Hsüeh replied.

“The one on the right is a ten spot,” Yüan Yang pursued.

“In the tenth moon the plum bloom on the hills emits its fragrant smell,”

Mrs. Hsüeh added.

“The middle piece is the two and five, making the ‘unlike seven;’” Yüan Yang observed.

“The ‘spinning damsel’ star meets the ‘cow-herd’ on the eve of the seventh day of the seventh moon,”

Miss Hsüeh said.

“Together they form: ‘Erh Lang strolls on the five mounds;’” Yüan Yang continued.

“Mortals cannot be happy as immortals,”

Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined.

Her answers over, the whole company extolled them and had a drink. “I’ve got another set!” Yüan Yang once more exclaimed. “On the left, are distinctly the distant dots of the double ace.”

“Both sun and moon are so suspended as to shine on heaven and earth,”

Hsiang-yün ventured.

“On the right, are a couple of spots, far apart, which clearly form a one and one.” Yüan Yang pursued.

“What time a lonesome flower falls to the ground, no sound is audible,”

Hsiang-yün rejoined.

“In the middle, there is the one and four,” Yüan Yang added.

“The red apricot tree is planted by the sun, and leans against the clouds;”

Hsiang-yün answered.

“Together they form the ‘cherry fruit ripens for the ninth time,’” Yüan Yang said.

“In the imperial garden it is pecked by birds.”

Hsiang-yün replied.

When she had done with her part, she drank a cup of wine. “I’ve got another set,” Yüan Yang began, “the one on the left is a double three.”

“The swallows, pair by pair, chatter on the beams;”

Pao-ch’ai remarked.

“The right piece is a six,” Yüan Yang added.

“The marsh flower is stretched by the breeze e’en to the length of a green sash,”

Pao-ch’ai returned.

“The centre piece is a three and six, making a nine spot,” Yüan Yang pursued.

“The three hills tower half beyond the azure skies;”

Pao-ch’ai rejoined.

“Lumped together they form: a ‘chain-bound solitary boat,’” Yüan Yang resumed.

“Where there are wind and waves, there I feel sad;”

Pao-ch’ai answered.

When she had finished her turn and drained her cup, Yüan Yang went on again. “On the left,” she said, “there’s a ‘heaven.’”

“A morning fine and beauteous scenery, but, alas, what a day for me!”

Tai-yü replied.

When this line fell on Pao-chai’s ear, she turned her head round and cast a glance at her, but Tai-yü was so nervous lest she should have to pay a forfeit that she did not so much as notice her.

“In the middle there’s the ‘colour of the embroidered screen, (ten spots, four and six), is beautiful,’” Yüan Yang proceeded.

“Not e’en Hung Niang to the gauze window comes, any message to bring.”

Tai-yü responded.

“There now remains a two and six, eight in all,” Yüan Yang resumed.

“Twice see the jady throne when led in to perform the court ritual,”

Tai-yü replied.

“Together they form ‘a basket suitable for putting plucked flowers in,’” Yüan Yang continued.

“The fairy wand smells nice as on it hangs a peony.”

Tai-yü retorted.

At the close of her replies, she took a sip of wine. Yüan Yang then resumed. “On the left,” she said, “there’s a four and five, making a ‘different-combined nine.’”

“The peach blossoms bear heavy drops of rain;”

Ying Ch’un remarked.

The company laughed. “She must be fined!” they exclaimed. “She has made a mistake in the rhyme. Besides, it isn’t right!”

Ying Ch’un smiled and drank a sip. The fact is that both lady Feng and Yüan Yang were so eager to hear the funny things that would be uttered by old goody Liu, that they with one voice purposely ruled that every one answered wrong and fined them. When it came to Madame Wang’s turn, Yüan Yang recited something for her. Next followed old goody Liu.

“When we country-people have got nothing to do,” old goody Liu said, “a few of us too often come together and play this sort of game; but the answers we give are not so high-flown; yet, as I can’t get out of it, I’ll likewise make a try!”

“It’s easy enough to say what there is,” one and all laughed, “so just you go on and don’t mind!”

“On the left,” Yüan Yang smiled, “there’s a double four, *i.e.* ‘man.’”

Goody Liu listened intently. After considerable reflection,

“It’s a peasant!”

she cried.

One and all in the room blurted out laughing.

“Well-said!” dowager lady Chia observed with a laugh, “that’s the way.”

“All we country-people know,” old goody Liu proceeded, also laughing, “is just what comes within our own rough-and-ready wits, so young ladies and ladies pray don’t poke fun at me!”

“In the centre there’s the three and four, green matched with red,” Yüan Yang pursued.

“The large fire burnt the hairy caterpillar;”

old goody Liu ventured.

“This will do very well!”, the party laughed, “go on with what is in your line.”

“On the right,” Yüan Yang smilingly continued, “there’s a one and four, and is really pretty.”

“A turnip and a head of garlic.”

old goody Liu answered.

This reply evoked further laughter from the whole company.

“Altogether, it’s a twig of flowers,” Yüan Yang added laughing.

“The flower dropped, and a huge melon formed.”

old goody Liu observed, while gesticulating with both her hands by way of illustration.

The party once more exploded in loud merriment.

But, reader, if you entertain any curiosity to hear what else was said during the banquet, listen to the explanation given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLI.

Chia Pao-yü tastes tea in the Lung Ts'ui monastery. Old goody Liu gets drunk and falls asleep in the I Hung court.

Old goody Liu, so the story goes, exclaimed, while making signs with both hands,

"The flower dropped and a huge melon formed;"

to the intense amusement of all the inmates, who burst into a boisterous fit of laughter. In due course, however, she drank the closing cup. Then she made another effort to evoke merriment. "To speak the truth to-day," she smilingly observed, "my hands and my feet are so rough, and I've had so much wine that I must be careful; or else I might, by a slip of the hand, break the porcelain cups. If you have got any wooden cups, you'd better produce them. It wouldn't matter then if even they were to slip out of my hands and drop on the ground!"

This joke excited some more mirth. But lady Feng, upon hearing this speedily put on a smile. "Well," she said, "if you really want a wooden one, I'll fetch you one at once! But there's just one word I'd like to tell you beforehand. Wooden cups are not like porcelain ones. They go in sets; so you'll have to do the right thing and drink from every cup of the set."

"I just now simply spoke in jest about those cups in order to induce them to laugh," old goody Liu at these words, mused within herself, "but, who would have thought that she actually has some of the kind. I've often been to the large households of village gentry on a visit, and even been to banquets there and seen both gold cups and silver cups; but never have I beheld any wooden ones about! Ah, of course! They must, I expect, be the wooden bowls used by the young children. Their object must be to inveigle me to have a couple of bowlfuls more than is good for me! But I don't mind it. This wine is, verily, like honey, so if I drink a little more, it won't do me any harm."

Bringing this train of thought to a close, "Fetch them!" she said aloud. "We'll talk about them by and bye."

Lady Feng then directed Feng Erh to go and bring the set of ten cups, made of bamboo roots, from the bookcase in the front inner room. Upon hearing her orders, Feng Erh was about to go and execute them, when Yüan Yang smilingly

interposed. “I know those ten cups of yours,” she remarked, “they’re small. What’s more, a while back you mentioned wooden ones, and if you have bamboo ones brought now, it won’t look well; so we’d better get from our place that set of ten large cups, scooped out of whole blocks of aspen roots, and pour the contents of all ten of them down her throat?”

“Yes, that would be much better,” lady Feng smiled.

The cups were then actually brought by a servant, at the direction of Yüan Yang. At the sight of them, old goody Liu was filled with surprise as well as with admiration. Surprise, as the ten formed one set going in gradation from large to small; the largest being amply of the size of a small basin, the smallest even measuring two of those she held in her hand. Admiration, as they were all alike, engraved, in perfect style, with scenery, trees, and human beings, and bore inscriptions in the ‘grass’ character as well as the seal of the writer.

“It will be enough,” she consequently shouted with alacrity, “if you give me that small one.”

“There’s no one,” lady Feng laughingly insinuated, “with the capacity to tackle these! Hence it is that not a soul can pluck up courage enough to use them! But as you, old dame, asked for them, and they were fished out, after ever so much trouble, you’re bound to do the proper thing and drink out of each, one after the other.”

Old goody Liu was quite taken aback. “I daren’t!” she promptly demurred. “My dear lady, do let me off!”

Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh and Madame Wang were quite alive to the fact that a person advanced in years as she was could not be gifted with such powers of endurance, and they hastened to smilingly expostulate. “To speak is to speak, and a joke is a joke, but she mayn’t take too much,” they said; “let her just empty this first cup, and have done.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” ejaculated old goody Liu. “I’ll only have a small cupful, and put this huge fellow away, and take it home and drink at my leisure.”

At this remark, the whole company once more gave way to laughter. Yüan Yang had no alternative but to give in and she had to bid a servant fill a large cup full of wine. Old goody Liu laid hold of it with both hands and raised it to her mouth.

“Gently a bit!” old lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh shouted. “Mind you don’t choke!”

Mrs. Hsüeh then told lady Feng to put some viands before her. “Goody Liu!” smiled lady Feng, “tell me the name of anything you fancy, and I’ll bring it and feed you.”

“What names can I know?” old goody Liu rejoined. “Everything is good!”

“Bring some egg-plant and salt-fish for her!” dowager lady Chia suggested with a smile.

Lady Feng, upon hearing this suggestion, complied with it by catching some egg-plant and salt-fish with two chopsticks and putting them into old goody Liu’s mouth. “You people,” she smiled, “daily feed on egg-plants; so taste these of ours and see whether they’ve been nicely prepared or not.”

“Don’t be making a fool of me!” old goody Liu answered smilingly. “If egg-plants can have such flavour, we ourselves needn’t sow any cereals, but confine ourselves to growing nothing but egg-plants!”

“They’re really egg-plants!” one and all protested. “She’s not pulling your leg!”

Old goody Liu was amazed. “If these be actually egg-plants,” she said, “I’ve uselessly eaten them so long! But, my lady, do give me a few more; I’d like to taste the next mouthful carefully!”

Lady Feng brought her, in very deed, another lot, and put it in her mouth. Old goody Liu munched for long with particular care. “There is, it’s true, something about them of the flavour of egg-plant,” she laughingly remarked, “yet they don’t quite taste like egg-plants. But tell me how they’re cooked, so that I may prepare them in the same way for myself.”

“There’s nothing hard about it!” lady Feng answered smiling. “You take the newly cut egg-plants and pare the skin off. All you want then is some fresh meat. You hash it into fine mince, and fry it in chicken fat. Then you take some dry chicken meat, and mix it with mushrooms, new bamboo shoots, sweet mushrooms, dry beancurd paste, flavoured with five spices, and every kind of dry fruits, and you chop the whole lot into fine pieces. You then bake all these things in chicken broth, until it’s absorbed, when you fry them, to finish, in sweet oil, and adding some oil, made of the grains of wine, you place them in a

porcelain jar, and close it hermetically. At any time that you want any to eat, all you have to do is to take out some, and mix it with some roasted chicken, and there it is all ready."

Old goody Liu a shook her head and put out her tongue. "My Buddha's ancestor!" she shouted. "One wants about ten chickens to prepare this dish! It isn't strange then that it has this flavour!"

Saying this, she quietly finished her wine. But still she kept on minutely scrutinizing the cup.

"Haven't you yet had enough to satisfy you?" lady Feng smiled. "If you haven't, well, then drink another cup."

"Dreadful!" eagerly exclaimed old goody Liu. "I shall be soon getting so drunk that it will be the very death of me. I was only looking at it as I admire pretty things like this! But what a trouble it must have cost to turn out!"

"Have you done with your wine?" Yuan Yang laughingly inquired. "But, after all, what kind of wood is this cup made of?"

"It isn't to be wondered at," old goody Liu smiled, "that you can't make it out Miss! How ever could you people, who live inside golden doors and embroidered apartments, know anything of wood! We have the whole day long the trees in the woods as our neighbours. When weary, we use them as our pillows and go to sleep on them. When exhausted, we sit with our backs leaning against them. When, in years of dearth, we feel the pangs of hunger, we also feed on them. Day after day, we see them with our eyes; day after day we listen to them with our ears; day after day, we talk of them with our mouths. I am therefore well able to tell whether any wood be good or bad, genuine or false. Do let me then see what it is!"

As she spoke, she intently scanned the cup for a considerable length of time. "Such a family as yours," she then said, "could on no account own mean things! Any wood that is easily procured, wouldn't even find a place in here. This feels so heavy, as I weigh it in my hands, that if it isn't aspen, it must, for a certainty, be yellow cedar."

Her rejoinder amused every one in the room. But they then perceived an old matron come up. After asking permission of dowager lady Chia to speak: "The

young ladies," she said, "have got to the Lotus Fragrance pavilion, and they request your commands, as to whether they should start with the rehearsal at once or tarry a while."

"I forgot all about them!" old lady Chia promptly cried with a smile. "Tell them to begin rehearsing at once!"

The matron expressed her obedience and walked away. Presently, became audible the notes of the pan-pipe and double flute, now soft, now loud, and the blended accents of the pipe and fife. So balmy did the breeze happen to be and the weather so fine that the strains of music came wafted across the arbours and over the stream, and, needless to say, conduced to exhilarate their spirits and to cheer their hearts. Unable to resist the temptation, Pao-yü was the first to snatch a decanter and to fill a cup for himself. He quaffed it with one breath. Then pouring another cup, he was about to drain it, when he noticed that Madame Wang too was anxious for a drink, and that she bade a servant bring a warm supply of wine. "With alacrity, Pao-yü crossed over to her, and, presenting his own cup, he applied it to Madame Wang's lips. His mother drank two sips while he held it in his hands, but on the arrival of the warm wine, Pao-yü resumed his seat. Madame Wang laid hold of the warm decanter, and left the table, while the whole party quitted their places at the banquet; and Mrs. Hsüeh too rose to her feet.

"Take over that decanter from her," dowager lady Chia promptly shouted to Li Wan and lady Feng, "and press your aunt into a seat. We shall all then feel at ease!"

Hearing this, Madame Wang surrendered the decanter to lady Feng and returned to her seat.

"Let's all have a couple of cups of wine!" old lady Chia laughingly cried. "It's capital fun to-day!"

With this proposal, she laid hold of a cup and offered it to Mrs. Hsüeh. Turning also towards Hsiang-yün and Pao-ch'ai: "You two cousins!" she added, "must also have a cup. Your cousin Lin can't take much wine, but even she mustn't be let off."

While pressing them, she drained her cup. Hsiang-yün, Pao-ch'ai and Tai-y ü then had their drink. But about this time old goody Liu caught the strains of

music, and, being already under the influence of liquor, her spirits became more and more exuberant, and she began to gesticulate and skip about. Her pranks amused Pao-yü to such a degree that leaving the table, he crossed over to where Tai-yü was seated and observed laughingly: “Just you look at the way old goody Liu is going on!”

“In days of yore,” Tai-yü smiled, “every species of animal commenced to dance the moment the sounds of music broke forth. She’s like a buffalo now.”

This simile made her cousins laugh. But shortly the music ceased. “We’ve all had our wine,” Mrs. Hsüeh smilingly proposed, “so let’s go and stroll about for a time; we can after that sit down again!”

Dowager lady Chia herself was at the moment feeling a strong inclination to have a ramble. In due course, therefore, they all left the banquet and went with their old senior, for a walk. Dowager lady Chia, however, longed to take goody Liu along with her to help her dispel her ennui, so promptly seizing the old dame’s hand in hers, they threaded their way as far as the trees, which stood facing the hill. After lolling about with her for a few minutes, “What kind of tree is this?” she went on to inquire of her. “What kind of stone is this? What species of flower is that?”

Old goody Liu gave suitable reply to each of her questions. “Who’d ever have imagined it,” she proceeded to tell dowager lady Chia; “not only are the human beings in the city grand, but even the birds are grand. Why, the moment these birds fly into your mansion, they also become beautiful things, and acquire the gift of speech as well!”

The company could not make out the drift of her observations. “What birds get transformed into beautiful things and become able to speak?” they felt impelled to ask.

“Those perched on those gold stands, under the verandah, with green plumage and red beaks are parrots. I know them well enough!” Goody Liu replied. “But those old black crows in the cages there have crests like phoenixes! They can talk too!”

One and all laughed. But not long elapsed before they caught sight of several waiting-maids, who came to invite them to a collation.

“After the number of cups of wine I’ve had,” old lady Chia said, “I don’t feel hungry. But never mind, bring the things here. We can nibble something at our leisure.”

The maids speedily went off and fetched two teapoys; but they also brought a couple of small boxes with partitions. When they came to be opened and to be examined, the contents of each were found to consist of two kinds of viands. In the one, were two sorts of steamed eatables. One of these was a sweet cake, made of lotus powder, scented with sun-flower. The other being rolls with goose fat and fir cone seeds. The second box contained two kinds of fried eatables; one of which was small dumplings, about an inch in size.

“What stuffing have they put in them?” dowager lady Chia asked.

“They’re with crabs inside,” ‘hastily rejoined the matrons.

Their old mistress, at this reply, knitted her eyebrows. “These fat, greasy viands for such a time!” she observed. “Who’ll ever eat these things?”

But finding, when she came to inspect the other kind, that it consisted of small fruits of flour, fashioned in every shape, and fried in butter, she did not fancy these either. She then however pressed Mrs. Hsüeh to have something to eat, but Mrs. Hsüeh merely took a piece of cake, while dowager lady Chia helped herself to a roll; but after tasting a bit, she gave the remaining half to a servant girl.

Goody Liu saw how beautifully worked those small flour fruits were, made as they were in various colours and designs, and she took, after picking and choosing, one which looked like a peony. “The most ingenious girls in our village could not, even with a pair of scissors, cut out anything like this in paper!” she exclaimed. “I would like to eat it, but I can’t make up my mind to! I had better pack up a few and take them home and give them to them as specimens!”

Her remarks amused every one.

“When you start for home,” dowager lady Chia said, “I’ll give you a whole porcelain jar full of them; so you may as well eat these first, while they are hot!”

The rest of the inmates selected such of the fruits as took their fancy, but after they had helped themselves to one or two, they felt satisfied. Goody Liu,

however, had never before touched such delicacies. These were, in addition, made small, dainty, and without the least semblance of clumsiness, so when she and Pan Erh had served themselves to a few of each sort, half the contents of the dish vanished. But what remained of them were then, at the instance of lady Feng, put into two plates, and sent, together with a partition-box, to Wen Kuan and the other singing girls as their share.

At an unexpected moment, they perceived the nurse come in with Ta Chieh-erh in her arms, and they all induced her to have a romp with them for a time. But while Ta Chieh-erh was holding a large pumelo and amusing herself with it, she casually caught sight of Pan Erh with a 'Buddha's hand.' Ta Chieh would have it. A servant-girl endeavoured to coax (Pan-Erh) to surrender it to her, but Ta Chieh-erh, unable to curb her impatience, burst out crying. It was only after the pumelo had been given to Pan-Erh, and that the 'Buddha's hand' had, by dint of much humouring, been got from Pan Erh and given to her, that she stopped crying.

Pan Erh had played quite long enough with the 'Buddha's hand,' and had, at the moment, his two hands laden with fruits, which he was in the course of eating. When he suddenly besides saw how scented and round the pumelo was, the idea dawned on him that it was more handy for play, and, using it as a ball, he kicked it along and went off to have some fun, relinquishing at once every thought of the 'Buddha's hand.'

By this time dowager lady Chia and the other members had had tea, so leading off again goody Liu, they threaded their way to the Lung Ts'ui monastery. Miao Yü hastened to usher them in. On their arrival in the interior of the court, they saw the flowers and trees in luxuriant blossom.

"Really," smiled old lady Chia, "it's those people, who devote themselves to an ascetic life and have nothing to do, who manage, by constant repairs, to make their places much nicer than those of others!"

As she spoke, she wended her steps towards the Eastern hall. Miao Yü, with a face beaming with smiles, made way for her to walk in. "We've just been filling ourselves with wines and meats," dowager lady Chia observed, "and with the josses you've got in here, we shall be guilty of profanity. We'd better therefore sit here! But give us some of that good tea of yours; and we'll get off so soon as we have had a cup of it."

Pao-yü watched Miao Yü‘s movements intently, when he noticed her lay hold of a small tea-tray, fashioned in the shape of a peony, made of red carved lacquer, and inlaid with designs in gold representing a dragon ensconced in the clouds with the character ‘longevity’ clasped in its jaws, a tray, which contained a small multicoloured cup with cover, fabricated at the ‘Ch’eng’ Kiln, and present it to his grandmother.

“I don’t care for ‘Liu An’ tea!” old lady Chia exclaimed.

“I know it; but this is old ‘Chün Mei,’” Miao Yü answered with a smile.

Dowager lady Chia received the cup. “What water is this?” she went on to inquire.

“It’s rain water collected last year;” Miao Yü added by way of reply.

Old lady Chia readily drank half a cup of the tea; and smiling, she proffered it to goody Liu. “Just you taste this tea!” she said.

Goody Liu drained the remainder with one draught. “It’s good, of course,” she remarked laughingly, “but it’s rather weak! It would be far better were it brewed a little stronger!”

Dowager lady Chia and all the inmates laughed. But subsequently, each of them was handed a thin, pure white covered cup, all of the same make, originating from the ‘Kuan’ kiln. Miao Yü, however, soon gave a tug at Pao-ch’ai’s and Tai-yü‘s lapels, and both quitted the apartment along with her. But Pao-yü too quietly followed at their heels. Spying Miao Yü show his two cousins into a side-room, Pao-ch’ai take a seat in the court, Tai-yü seat herself on Miao Yü‘s rush mat, and Miao Yü herself approach a stove, fan the fire and boil some water, with which she brewed another pot of tea, Pao-yü walked in. “Are you bent upon drinking your own private tea?” he smiled.

“Here you rush again to steal our tea,” the two girls laughed with one accord. “There’s none for you!”

But just as Miao Yü was going to fetch a cup, she perceived an old taoist matron bring away the tea things, which had been used in the upper rooms. “Don’t put that ‘Ch’eng’ kiln tea-cup by!” Miao Yü hastily shouted. “Go and put it outside!”

Pao-yü understood that it must be because old goody Liu had drunk out of it that she considered it too dirty to keep. He then saw Miao Yü produce two other cups. The one had an ear on the side. On the bowl itself were engraved in three characters: ‘calabash cup,’ in the plain ‘square’ writing. After these, followed a row of small characters in the ‘true’ style, to the effect that the cup had been an article much treasured by Wang K’ai. Next came a second row of small characters stating: ‘that in the course of the fourth moon of the fifth year of Yuan Feng, of the Sung dynasty, Su Shih of Mei Shan had seen it in the ‘Secret’ palace.

This cup, Miao Yü filled, and handed to Pao-ch’ai.

The other cup was, in appearance, as clumsy as it was small; yet on it figured an engraved inscription, consisting of ‘spotted rhinoceros cup,’ in three ‘seal’ characters, which bore the semblance of pendent pearls. Miao Yü replenished this cup and gave it to Tai-yü; and taking the green jade cup, which she had, on previous occasions, often used for her own tea, she filled it and presented it to Pao-yü.

“‘The rules observed in the world,’ the adage says, ‘must be impartial,’” Pao-yü smiled. “But while my two cousins are handling those antique and rare gems, here am I with this coarse object!”

“Is this a coarse thing?” Miao Yü exclaimed. “Why, I’m making no outrageous statement when I say that I’m inclined to think that it is by no means certain that you could lay your hand upon any such coarse thing as this in your home!”

“‘Do in the country as country people do,’ the proverb says,” Pao-yü laughingly rejoined. “So when one gets in a place like this of yours, one must naturally look down upon every thing in the way of gold, pearls, jade and precious stones, as coarse rubbish!”

This sentiment highly delighted Miao Yü. So much so, that producing another capacious cup, carved out of a whole bamboo root, which with its nine curves

and ten rings, with twenty knots in each ring, resembled a coiled dragon, “Here,” she said with a face beaming with smiles, “there only remains this one! Can you manage this large cup?”

“I can!” Pao-yü vehemently replied, with high glee.

“Albeit you have the stomach to tackle all it holds,” Miao Yü laughed, “I haven’t got so much tea for you to waste! Have you not heard how that the first cup is the ‘taste’-cup; the second ‘the stupid-thing-for-quenching-one’s-thirst,’ and the third ‘the drink-mule’ cup? But were you now to go in for this huge cup, why what more wouldn’t that be?”

At these words, Pao-ch’ai, Tai-yü and Pao-yü simultaneously indulged in laughter. But Miao-yü seized the teapot, and poured well-nigh a whole cupful of tea into the big cup. Pao-yü tasted some carefully, and found it, in real truth, so exceptionally soft and pure that he extolled it with incessant praise.

“If you’ve had any tea this time,” Miao-Yü pursued with a serious expression about her face, “it’s thanks to these two young ladies; for had you come alone, I wouldn’t have given you any.”

“I’m well aware of this,” Pao-yü laughingly rejoined, “so I too will receive no favour from your hands, but simply express my thanks to these two cousins of mine, and have done!”

“What you say makes your meaning clear enough!” Miao-yü said, when she heard his reply.

“Is this rain water from last year?” Tai-yü then inquired.

“How is it,” smiled Miao Yü sardonically, “that a person like you can be such a boor as not to be able to discriminate water, when you taste it? This is snow collected from the plum blossom, five years back, when I was in the P’an Hsiang temple at Hsüan Mu. All I got was that flower jar, green as the devil’s face, full, and as I couldn’t make up my mind to part with it and drink it, I interred it in the ground, and only opened it this summer. I’ve had some of it once before, and this is the second time. But how is it you didn’t detect it, when you put it to your lips? Has rain water, obtained a year back, ever got such a soft and pure flavour? and how possibly could it be drunk at all?”

Tai-yü knew perfectly what a curious disposition she naturally had, and she did not think it advisable to start any lengthy discussion with her. Nor did she feel justified to protract her stay, so after sipping her tea, she intimated to Pao-ch'ai her intention to go, and they quitted the apartment.

Pao-yü gave a forced smile to Miao Yü. "That cup," he said, "is, of course, dirty; but is it not a pity to put it away for no valid reason? To my idea it would be preferable, wouldn't it? to give it to that poor old woman; for were she to sell it, she could have the means of subsistence! What do you say, will it do?"

Miao Yü listened to his suggestion, and then nodded her head, after some reflection. "Yes, that will be all right!" she answered. "Lucky for her I've never drunk a drop out of that cup, for had I, I would rather have smashed it to atoms than have let her have it! If you want to give it to her, I don't mind a bit about it; but you yourself must hand it to her! Now, be quick and clear it away at once!"

"Of course; quite so!" Pao-yü continued. "How could you ever go and speak to her? Things would then come to a worse pass. You too would be contaminated! If you give it to me, it will be all right."

Miao Yü there and then directed some one to fetch it and to give it to Pao-yü. When it was brought, Pao-yü took charge of it. "Wait until we've gone out," he proceeded, "and I'll call a few servant-boys and bid them carry several buckets of water from the stream and wash the floors; eh, shall I?"

"Yes, that would be better!" Miao Yü smiled. "The only thing is that you must tell them to bring the water, and place it outside the entrance door by the foot of the wall; for they mustn't come in."

"This goes without saying!" Pao-yü said; and, while replying, he produced the cup from inside his sleeve, and handed it to a young waiting-maid from dowager lady Chia's apartments to hold. "Tomorrow," he told her, "give this to goody Liu to take with her, when she starts on her way homewards!"

By the time he made (the girl) understand the charge he entrusted her with, his old grandmother issued out and was anxious to return home. Miao Yü did not exert herself very much to induce her to prolong her visit; but seeing her as far the main gate, she turned round and bolted the doors. But without devoting any further attention to her, we will now allude to dowager lady Chia.

She felt thoroughly tired and exhausted. To such a degree, that she desired Madame Wang, Ying Ch'un and her sisters to see that Mrs. Hsüeh had some wine, while she herself retired to the Tao Hsiang village to rest. Lady Feng immediately bade some servants fetch a bamboo chair. On its arrival, dowager lady Chia seated herself in it, and two matrons carried her off hemmed in by lady Feng, Li Wan and a bevy of servant-girls, and matrons. But let us now leave her to herself, without any additional explanations.

During this while, Mrs. Hsüeh too said good bye and departed. Madame Wang then dismissed Wen Kuan and the other girls, and, distributing the eatables, that had been collected in the partition-boxes, to the servant-maids to go and feast on, she availed herself of the leisure moments to lie off; so reclining as she was, on the couch, which had been occupied by her old relative a few minutes back, she bade a young maid lower the portière; after which, she asked her to massage her legs.

"Should our old lady yonder send any message, mind you call me at once," she proceeded to impress on her mind, and, laying herself down, she went to sleep.

Pao-yü, Hsiang-yün and the rest watched the servant-girls take the partition-boxes and place them among the rocks, and seat themselves some on boulders, others on the turf-covered ground, some lean against the trees, others squat down besides the pool, and thoroughly enjoy themselves. But in a little time, they also perceived Yüan Yang arrive. Her object in coming was to carry off goody Liu for a stroll, so in a body they followed in their track, with a view of deriving some fun. Shortly, they got under the honorary gateway put up in the additional grounds, reserved for the imperial consort's visits to her parents, and old goody Liu shouted aloud: "Ai-yoh! What! Is there another big temple here!"

While speaking, she prostrated herself and knocked her head, to the intense amusement of the company, who were quite doubled up with laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" goody Liu inquired. "I can decipher the characters on this honorary gateway. Over at our place temples of this kind are exceedingly plentiful; and they've all got archways like this! These characters give the name of the temple."

"Can you make out from those characters what temple this is?" they laughingly asked.

Goody Liu quickly raised her head, and, pointing at the inscription, “Are’nt these,” she said, “the four characters ‘Pearly Emperor’s Precious Hall?’”

Everybody laughed. They clapped their hands and applauded. But when about to chaff her again, goody Liu experienced a rumbling noise in her stomach, and vehemently pulling a young servant-girl, and asking her for a couple of sheets of paper, she began immediately to loosen her garments. “It won’t do in here!” one and all laughingly shouted out to her, and quickly they directed a matron to lead her away. When they got at the north-east corner, the matron pointed the proper place out to her, and in high spirits she walked off and went to have some rest.

Goody Liu had taken plenty of wine; she could not too touch yellow wine; she had, what is more, drunk and eaten so many fat things that in the thirst, which supervened, she had emptied several cups of tea; the result was that she unavoidably got looseness of the bowels. She therefore squatted for ever so long before she felt any relief. But on her exit from the private chamber, the wind blew the wine to her head. Besides, being a woman well up in years, she felt, upon suddenly rising from a long squatting position, her eyes grow so dim and her head so giddy that she could not make out the way. She gazed on all four quarters, but the whole place being covered with trees, rockeries, towers, terraces, and houses, she was quite at a loss how to determine her whereabouts, and where each road led to. She had no alternative but to follow a stone road, and to toddle on her way with leisurely step. But when she drew near a building, she could not make out where the door could be. After searching and searching, she accidentally caught sight of a bamboo fence. “Here’s another trellis with flat bean plants creeping on it!” Goody Liu communed within herself. While giving way to reflection, she skirted the flower-laden hedge, and discovering a moonlike, cavelike, entrance, she stepped in. Here she discerned, stretching before her eyes a sheet of water, forming a pond, which measured no more than seven or eight feet in breadth. Its banks were paved with slabs of stone. Its jadelike waves flowed in a limpid stream towards the opposite direction. At the upper end, figured a slab of white marble, laid horizontally over the surface. Goody Liu wended her steps over the slab and followed the raised stone-road; then turning two bends, in the lake, an entrance into a house struck her gaze. Forthwith, she crossed the doorway, but her eyes were soon attracted by a young girl, who advanced to greet her with a smile playing upon her lips.

“The young ladies,” goody Liu speedily remarked laughing, “have cast me adrift; they made me knock about, until I found my way in here.”

But seeing, after addressing her, that the girl said nothing by way of reply, goody Liu approached her and seized her by the hand, when, with a crash, she fell against the wooden partition wall and bumped her head so that it felt quite sore. Upon close examination, she discovered that it was a picture. “Do pictures really so bulge out!” Goody Liu mused within herself, and, as she exercised her mind with these cogitations, she scanned it and rubbed her hand over it. It was perfectly even all over. She nodded her head, and heaved a couple of sighs. But the moment she turned round, she espied a small door over which hung a soft portière, of leek-green colour, bestrewn with embroidered flowers. Goody Liu lifted the portière and walked in. Upon raising her head, and casting a glance round, she saw the walls, artistically carved in fretwork. On all four sides, lutes, double-edged swords, vases and censers were stuck everywhere over the walls; and embroidered covers and gauze nets, glistened as brightly as gold, and shed a lustre vying with that of pearls. Even the bricks, on the ground, on which she trod, were jadelike green, inlaid with designs, so that her eyes got more and more dazzled. She tried to discover an exit, but where could she find a doorway? On the left, was a bookcase. On the right, a screen. As soon as she repaired behind the screen, she faced a door; but, she then caught sight of another old dame stepping in from outside, and advancing towards her. Goody Liu was wonderstruck. Her mind was full of uncertainty as to whether it might not be her son-in-law’s mother. “I expect,” she felt prompted to ask with vehemence, “you went to the trouble of coming to hunt for me, as you didn’t see me turn up at home for several days, eh? But what young lady introduced you in here?” Then noticing that her whole head was bedecked with flowers, old goody Liu laughed. “How ignorant of the ways of the world you are!” she said. “Seeing the nice flowers in this garden, you at once set to work, forgetful of all consequences, and loaded your pate with them!”

However, while she derided her, the other old dame simply laughed, without making any rejoinder. But the recollection suddenly flashed to her memory that she had often heard of some kind of cheval-glasses, found in wealthy and well-to-do families, and, “May it not be,” (she wondered), “my own self reflected in this glass!” After concluding this train of thoughts, she put out her hands, and feeling it and then minutely scrutinising it, she realised that the four wooden partition walls were made of carved blackwood, into which mirrors had been inserted. “These have so far impeded my progress,” she consequently exclaimed, “and how am I to manage to get out?”

As she soliloquised, she kept on rubbing the mirror. This mirror was, in fact,

provided with some western mechanism, which enabled it to open and shut, so while goody Liu inadvertently passed her hands, quite at random over its surface, the pressure happily fell on the right spot, and opening the contrivance, the mirror flung round, exposing a door to view. Old goody Liu was full of amazement as well as of admiration. With hasty step, she egressed. Her eyes unexpectedly fell on a most handsome set of bed-curtains. But being at the time still seven or eight tenths in the wind, and quite tired out from her tramp, she with one jump squatted down on the bed, saying to herself: “I’ll just have a little rest.” So little, however, did she, contrary to her expectations, have any control over herself, that, as she reeled backwards and forwards, her eyes got quite drowsy, and then the moment she threw herself in a recumbent position, she dropped into a sound sleep.

But let us now see what the others were up to. They waited for her and waited; but they saw nothing of her. Pan Erh got, in the absence of his grandmother, so distressed that he melted into tears. “May she not have fallen into the place?” one and all laughingly observed. “Be quick and tell some one to go and have a look!”

Two matrons were directed to go in search of her; but they returned and reported that she was not to be found. The whole party instituted a search in every nook and corner, but nothing could be seen of her.

“She was so drunk,” Hsi Jen suggested, “that she’s sure to have lost her way, and following this road, got into our back-rooms. Should she have crossed to the inner side of the hedge, she must have come to the door of the backhouse and got in. Nevertheless, the young maids, she must have come across, must know something about her. If she did not get inside the hedge, but continued in a south westerly direction, she’s all right, if she made a detour and walked out. But if she hasn’t done so, why, she’ll have enough of roaming for a good long while! I had better therefore go and see what she’s up to.”

With these words still on her lips, she retraced her footsteps and repaired into the I Hung court. She called out to the servants, but, who would have thought it, the whole bevy of young maids, attached to those rooms, had seized the opportunity to go and have a romp, so Hsi Jen straightway entered the door of the house. As soon as she turned the multicoloured embroidered screen, the sound of snoring as loud as peals of thunder, fell on her ear. Hastily she betook herself inside, but her nostrils were overpowered by the foul air of wine and w..d, which infected

the apartment. At a glance, she discovered old goody Liu lying on the bed, face downwards, with hands sprawled out and feet knocking about all over the place. Hsi Jen sustained no small shock. With precipitate hurry, she rushed up to her, and, laying hold of her, lying as she was more dead than alive, she pushed her about until she succeeded in rousing her to her senses. Old goody Liu was startled out of her sleep. She opened wide her eyes, and, realising that Hsi Jen stood before her, she speedily crawled up. “Miss!” she pleaded. “I do deserve death! I have done what I shouldn’t; but I haven’t in any way soiled the bed.”

So saying, she swept her hands over it. But Hsi Jen was in fear and trembling lest the suspicions of any inmate should be aroused, and lest Pao-yü should come to know of it, so all she did was to wave her hand towards her, bidding her not utter a word. Then with alacrity grasping three or four handfuls of ‘Pai Ho’ incense, she heaped it on the large tripod, which stood in the centre of the room, and put the lid back again; delighted at the idea that she had not been so upset as to be sick.

“It doesn’t matter!” she quickly rejoined in a low tone of voice with a smile, “I’m here to answer for this. Come along with me!”

While old goody Liu expressed her readiness to comply with her wishes, she followed Hsi Jen out into the quarters occupied by the young maids. Here (Hsi Jen) desired her to take a seat. “Mind you say,” she enjoined her, “that you were so drunk that you stretched on a boulder and had a snooze!”

“All right! I will!” old goody Liu promised.

Hsi Jen afterwards helped her to two cups of tea, when she, at length, got over the effects of the wine. “What young lady’s room is this that it is so beautiful?” she then inquired. “It seemed to me just as if I had gone to the very heavenly palace.”

Hsi Jen gave a faint smile. “This one?” she asked. “Why, it’s our master Secundus’, Mr. Pao’s bedroom.”

Old goody Liu was quite taken aback, and could not even presume to utter a sound. But Hsi Jen led her out across the front compound; and, when they met the inmates of the family, she simply explained to them that she had found her fast asleep on the grass, and brought her along. No one paid any heed to the excuse she gave, and the subject was dropped.

Presently, dowager lady Chia awoke, and the evening meal was at once served in the Tao Hsiang Ts'un. Dowager lady Chia was however quite listless, and felt so little inclined to eat anything that she forthwith got into a small open chair, with bamboo seat, and returned to her suite of rooms to rest. But she insisted that lady Feng and her companions should go and have their repast, so the young ladies eventually adjourned once more into the garden.

But, reader, you do not know the sequel, so peruse the circumstances given in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Princess of Heng Wu dispels, with sweet words, some insane suspicions. The inmate of Hsiao Hsiang puts, with excellent repartee, the final touch to the jokes made about goody Liu.

We will now resume our story by adding that, on the return of the young ladies into the garden, they had their meal. This over, they parted company, and nothing more need be said about them. We will notice, however, that old goody Liu took Pan Erh along with her, and came first and paid a visit to lady Feng. "We must certainly start for home tomorrow, as soon as it is daylight," she said. "I've stayed here, it's true, only two or three days, but in these few days I have reaped experience in everything that I had not seen from old till now. It would be difficult to find any one as compassionate of the poor and considerate to the old as your venerable dame, your Madame Wang, your young ladies, and the girls too attached to the various rooms, have all shown themselves in their treatment of me! When I get home now, I shall have no other means of showing how grateful I am to you than by purchasing a lot of huge joss-sticks and saying daily prayers to Buddha on your behalf; and if he spares you all to enjoy a long life of a hundred years my wishes will be accomplished."

"Don't be so exultant!" lady Feng smilingly replied. "It's all on account of you that our old ancestor has fallen ill, by exposing herself to draughts and that she suffers from disturbed sleep; also that our Ta Chieh-erh has caught a chill and is laid up at home with fever."

Goody Liu, at these words, speedily heaved a sigh. “Her venerable ladyship,” she said, “is a person advanced in years and not accustomed to any intense fatigue!”

“She has never before been in such high spirits as yesterday!” lady Feng observed. “As you were here, so anxious was she to let you see everything, that she trudged over the greater part of the garden. And Ta Chieh-erh was given a piece of cake by Madame Wang, when I came to hunt you up, and she ate it, who knows in what windy place, and began at once to get feverish.”

“Ta Chieh-erh,” goody Liu remarked, “hasn’t, I fancy, often put her foot into the garden; and young people like her mustn’t really go into strange places, for she’s not like our children, who are able to use their legs! In what graveyards don’t they ramble about! A puff of wind may, on the one hand, have struck her, it’s not at all unlikely; or being, on the other, so chaste in body, and her eyes also so pure she may, it is to be feared, have come across some spirit or other. I can’t help thinking therefore that you should consult some book of exorcisms on her behalf; for mind she may have run up against some evil influence.”

This remark suggested the idea to lady Feng. There and then she called P’ing Erh to fetch the ‘Jade Box Record.’ When brought, she desired Ts’ai Ming to look over it for her. Ts’ai Ming turned over the pages for a time, and then read: ‘Those who fall ill on the 25th day of the 8th moon have come across, in a due westerly quarter, of some flower spirit; they feel heavy, with no inclination for drink or food. Take seven sheets of white paper money, and, advancing forty steps due west, burn them and exorcise the spirit; recovery will follow at once!’”

“There’s really no mistake about that!” lady Feng smiled. “Are there not flower spirits in the garden? But what I dread is that our old lady mayn’t have come across one too.”

Saying this, she bade a servant purchase two lots of paper money. On their arrival, she sent for two proper persons, the one to exorcise the spirits for dowager lady Chia and the other to expel them from Ta Chieh-erh; and these observances over, Ta Chieh-erh did, in effect, drop quietly to sleep.

“It’s verily people advanced in years like you,” lady Feng smilingly exclaimed; “who’ve gone through many experiences! This Ta Chieh-erh of mine has often been inclined to ail, and it has quite puzzled me to make out how and why it

was."

"This isn't anything out of the way!" goody Liu said. "Affluent and honourable people bring up their offspring to be delicate. So naturally, they are not able to endure the least hardship! Moreover, that young child of yours is so excessively cuddled that she can't stand it. Were you, therefore, my lady, to pamper her less from henceforth, she'll steadily improve."

"There's plenty of reason in that too!" lady Feng observed. "But it strikes me that she hasn't as yet got a name, so do give her one in order that she may borrow your long life! In the next place, you are country-people, and are, after all,—I don't expect you'll get angry when I mention it,—somewhat in poor circumstances. Were a person then as poor as you are to suggest a name for her, you may, I trust, have the effect of counteracting this influence for her."

When old goody Liu heard this proposal, she immediately gave herself up to reflection. "I've no idea of the date of her birth!" she smiled after a time.

"She really was born on no propitious date!" lady Feng replied. "By a remarkable coincidence she came into the world on the seventh day of the seventh moon!"

"This is certainly splendid!" old goody Lin laughed with alacrity. "You had better name her at once Ch'iao Chieh-erh (seventh moon and ingenuity). This is what's generally called: combating poison by poison and attacking fire by fire. If therefore your ladyship fixes upon this name of mine, she will, for a surety, attain a long life of a hundred years; and when she by and bye grows up to be a big girl, every one of you will be able to have a home and get a patrimony! Or if, at any time, there occur anything inauspicious and she has to face adversity, why it will inevitably change into prosperity; and if she comes across any evil fortune, it will turn into good fortune. And this will all arise from this one word, 'Ch'iao' (ingenuity.)"

Lady Feng was, needless to say, delighted by what she heard, and she lost no time in expressing her gratitude. "If she be preserved," she exclaimed, "to accomplish your good wishes, it will be such a good thing!" Saying this, she called P'ing Erh. "As you and I are bound to be busy tomorrow," she said, "and won't, I fear, be able to spare any leisure moments, you'd better, if you have nothing to do now, get ready the presents for old goody Liu, so as to enable her

to conveniently start at early dawn tomorrow."

"How could I presume to be the cause of such reckless waste?" goody Liu interposed. "I've already disturbed your peace and quiet for several days, and were I to also take your things away, I'd feel still less at ease in my heart!"

"There's nothing much!" lady Feng protested. "They consist simply of a few ordinary things. But, whether good or bad, do take them along, so that the people in the same street as yourselves and your next-door neighbours may have some little excitement, and that it may look as if you had been on a visit to the city!"

But while she endeavoured to induce the old dame to accept the presents, she noticed P'ing Erh approach. "Goody Liu," she remarked, "come over here and see!"

Old goody Liu precipitately followed P'ing Erh into the room on the off side. Here she saw the stovecouch half full with piles of things. P'ing Erh took these up one by one and let her have a look at them. "This," she explained, "is a roll of that green gauze you asked for yesterday. Besides this, our lady Feng gives you a piece of thick bluish-white gauze to use as lining. These are two pieces of pongee, which will do for wadded coats and jupes as well. In this bundle are two pieces of silk, for you to make clothes with, for the end of the year. This is a box containing various home-made cakes. Among them are some you've already tasted and some you haven't; so take them along, and put them in plates and invite your friends; they'll be ever so much better than any that you could buy! These two bags are those in which the melons and fruit were packed up yesterday. This one has been filled with two bushels of fine rice, grown in the imperial fields, the like of which for congee, it would not be easy to get. This one contains fruits from our garden and all kinds of dry fruits. In this packet, you'll find eight taels of silver. These various things are presents for you from our Mistress Secunda. Each of these packets contains fifty taels so that there are in all a hundred taels; they're the gift of Madame Wang. She bids you accept them so as to either carry on any trade, for which no big capital is required, or to purchase several acres of land, in order that you mayn't henceforward have any more to beg favours of relatives, or to depend upon friends." Continuing, she added smilingly, in a low tone of voice, "These two jackets, two jupes, four head bands, and a bundle of velvet and thread are what I give you, worthy dame, as my share. These clothes are, it is true, the worse for use, yet I haven't worn them very much. But if you disdain them, I won't be so presuming as to say

anything."

After mention of each article by P'ing Erh, goody Liu muttered the name of Buddha, so already she had repeated Buddha's name several thousands of times. But when she saw the heap of presents which P'ing Erh too bestowed on her, and the little ostentation with which she did it, she promptly smiled. "Miss!" she said, "what are you saying? Could I ever disdain such nice gifts as these! Had I even the money, I couldn't buy them anywhere. The only thing is that I feel overpowered with shame. If I keep them, it won't be nice, and if I don't accept them, I shall be showing myself ungrateful for your kind attention."

"Don't utter all this irrelevant talk!" P'ing Erh laughed. "You and I are friends; so compose your mind and take the things I gave you just now! Besides, I have, on my part, something to ask of you. When the close of the year comes, select a few of your cabbages, dipped in lime, and dried in the sun, as well as some lentils, flat beans, tomatoes and pumpkin strips, and various sorts of dry vegetables and bring them over. We're all, both high or low, fond of such things. These will be quite enough! We don't want anything else, so don't go to any useless trouble!"

Goody Liu gave utterance to profuse expressions of gratitude and signified her readiness to comply with her wishes.

"Just you go to sleep," P'ing Erh urged, "and I'll get the things ready for you and put them in here. As soon as the day breaks tomorrow, I'll send the servant-lads to hire a cart and pack them in; don't you therefore worry yourself in the least on that score!"

Goody Liu felt more and more ineffably grateful. So crossing over, she again said, with warm protestations of thankfulness, good bye to lady Feng; after which, she repaired to dowager lady Chia's quarters on this side, where she slept, with one sleep, during the whole night. Early the next day, as soon as she had combed her hair and performed her ablutions, she asked to go and pay her adieus to lady Chia. But as old lady Chia was unwell, the various members of the family came to see how she was getting on. On their reappearance outside, they transmitted orders that the doctor should be sent for. In a little time, a matron reported that the doctor had arrived, and an old nurse invited dowager lady Chia to ensconce herself under the curtain.

“I’m an old woman!” lady Chia remonstrated. “Am I not aged enough to be a mother to that fellow? and am I, pray, to still stand on any ceremonies with him? There’s no need to drop the curtain; I’ll see him as I am, and have done.”

Hearing her objections, the matrons fetched a small table, and, laying a small pillow on it, they directed a servant to ask the doctor in.

Presently, they perceived the trio Chia Chen, Chia Lien, and Chia Jung, bringing Dr. Wang. Dr. Wang did not presume to use the raised road, but confining himself to the side steps, he kept pace with Chia Chen until they reached the platform. Two matrons, who had been standing, one on either side from an early hour, raised the portiére. A couple of old women servants then took the lead and showed the way in. But Pao-yü too appeared on the scene to meet them.

They found old lady Chia seated bolt upright on the couch, dressed in a blue crape jacket, lined with sheep skin, every curl of which resembled a pearl. On the right and left stood four young maids, whose hair had not as yet been allowed to grow, with fly-brushes, finger-bowls, and other such articles in their hands. Five or six old nurses were also drawn up on both sides like wings. At the back of the jade-green gauze mosquito-house were faintly visible several persons in red and green habiliments, with gems on their heads, and gold trinkets in their coiffures.

Dr. Wang could not muster the courage to raise his head. With speedy step, he advanced and paid his obeisance. Dowager lady Chia noticed that he wore the official dress of the sixth grade, and she accordingly concluded that he must be an imperial physician. “How are you noble doctor?” she inquired, forcing a smile. “What is the worthy surname of this noble doctor?” she then asked Chia Chen.

Chia Chen and his companions made prompt reply. “His surname is Wang,” they said.

“There was once a certain Wang Chün-hsiao who filled the chair of President of the College of Imperial Physicians,” dowager lady smilingly proceeded. “He excelled in feeling the pulse.”

Dr. Wang bent his body, and with alacrity he lowered his head and returned her smile. “That was,” he explained, “my grand uncle.”

“Is it really so!” laughingly pursued dowager lady Chia, upon catching this reply. “We can then call ourselves old friends!”

So speaking, she quietly put out her hand and rested it on the small pillow. A nurse laid hold of a small stool and placed it before the small table, slightly to the side of it. Dr. Wang bent one knee and took a seat on the stool. Drooping his head, he felt the pulse of the one hand for a long while; next, he examined that of the other; after which, hastily making a curtsey, he bent his head and started on his way out of the apartment.

“Excuse me for the trouble I’ve put you to!” dowager lady Chia smiled. “Chen Erh, escort him outside, and do see that he has a cup of tea.”

Chia Chen, Chia Lien and the rest of their companions immediately acquiesced by uttering several yes’s, and once more they led Dr. Wang into the outer study.

“Your worthy senior,” Dr. Wang explained, “has nothing else the matter with her than a slight chill, which she must have inadvertently contracted. She needn’t, after all, take any medicines; all she need do is to diet herself and keep warm a little; and she’ll get all right. But I’ll now write a prescription, in here. Should her venerable ladyship care to take any of the medicine, then prepare a dose, according to the prescription, and let her have it. But should she be loth to have any, well, never mind, it won’t be of any consequence.”

Saying this, he wrote the prescription, as he sipped his tea. But when about to take his leave, he saw a nurse bring Ta Chieh-erh into the room. “Mr. Wang,” she said, “do also have a look at our Chieh Erh!”

Upon hearing her appeal, Dr. Wang immediately rose to his feet. While she was clasped in her nurse’s arms, he rested Ta Chieh-erh’s hand on his left hand and felt her pulse with his right, and rubbing her forehead, he asked her to put out her tongue and let him see it. “Were I to express my views about Chieh Erh, you would again abuse me! If she’s, however, kept quiet and allowed to go hungry for a couple of meals, she’ll get over this. There’s no necessity for her to take any decocted medicines. I’ll just send her some pills, which you’ll have to dissolve in a preparation of ginger, and give them to her before she goes to sleep; when she has had these, there will be nothing more the matter with her.”

At the conclusion of these recommendations, he bade them goodbye and took his departure. Chia Chen and his companions then took the prescription and came

and explained to old lady Chia the nature of her indisposition, and, depositing on the table, the paper given to them by the doctor, they quitted her presence. But nothing more need be said about them.

Madame Wang and Li Wan, lady Feng, Pao Ch'ai and the other young ladies noticed, meanwhile, that the doctor had gone, and they eventually egressed from the back of the mosquito-house. After a short stay, Madame Wang returned to her quarters. Goody Liu repaired, when she perceived everything quiet again, into the upper rooms and made her adieus to dowager lady Chia.

"When you've got any leisure, do pay us another visit," old lady Chia urged, and bidding Yuan Yang come to her, "Do be careful," she added, "and see dame Liu safely on her way out; for not being well I can't escort you myself."

Goody Liu expressed her thanks, and saying good bye a second time, she betook herself, along with Yüan Yang, into the servants' quarters. Here Yüan Yang pointed at a bundle on the stovecouch. "These are," she said, "several articles of clothing, belonging to our old mistress; they were presented to her in years gone by, by members of our family on her birthdays and various festivals; her ladyship never wears anything made by people outside; yet to hoard these would be a downright pity! Indeed, she hasn't worn them even once. It was yesterday that she told me to get out two costumes and hand them to you to take along with you, either to give as presents, or to be worn by some one in your home; but don't make fun of us! In the box you'll find the flour-fruits, for which you asked. This bundle contains the medicines to which you alluded the other day. There are 'plum-blossom-spotted-tongue pills,' and 'purple-gold- ingot-pills,' also 'vivifying-blood-vessels-pills,' as well as 'driving-offspring and preserving-life pills;' each kind being rolled up in a sheet bearing the prescription; and the whole lot of them are packed up in here. While these two are purses for you to wear in the way of ornaments." So saying, she forthwith loosened the cord, and, producing two ingots representing pencils, and with 'ju i' on them, implying 'your wishes will surely be fulfilled,' she drew near and showed them to her, "Take the purses," she pursued smiling, "but do leave these behind and give them to me."

Goody Liu was so overjoyed that she had, from an early period, come out afresh with several thousands of invocations of Buddha's names. When she therefore heard Yüan Yang's suggestion, "Miss," she quickly rejoined, "you're at perfect liberty to keep them!"

Yüan Yang perceived that her words were believed by her; so smiling she once more dropped the ingots into the purse. “I was only joking with you for fun!” she observed. “I’ve got a good many like these; keep them therefore and give them, at the close of the year, to your young children.”

Speaking the while, she espied a young maid walk in with a cup from the ‘Ch’eng’ kiln, and hand it to old goody Liu. “This,” (she said,) “our master Secundus, Mr. Pao, gives you.”

“Whence could I begin enumerating the things I got!” Goody Liu exclaimed. “In what previous existence did I accomplish anything so meritorious as to bring to-day this heap of blessings upon me!”

With these words, she eagerly took possession of the cup.

“The clothes I gave you the other day, when I asked you to have a bath, were my own,” Yüan Yang resumed, “and if you don’t think them too mean, I’ve got a few more, which I would also like to let you have.”

Goody Liu thanked her with vehemence, so Yüan Yang, in point of fact, produced several more articles of clothing, and these she packed up for her. Goody Liu thereupon expressed a desire to also go into the garden and take leave of Pao-yü and the young ladies, Madame Wang and the other inmates and to thank them for all they did for her, but Yüan Yang raised objections. “You can dispense with going!” she remarked. “They don’t see any one just now! But I’ll deliver the message for you by and bye! When you’ve got any leisure, do come again. Go to the second gate,” she went on to direct an old matron, “and call two servant-lads to come here, and help this old dame to take her things away!”

After the matron had signified her obedience, Yüan Yang returned with goody Liu to lady Feng’s quarters, on the off part of the mansion, and, taking the presents as far as the side gate, she bade the servant-lads carry them out. She herself then saw goody Liu into her curricle and start on her journey homewards.

But without commenting further on this topic, let us revert to Pao-ch’ai and the other girls. After breakfast, they recrossed into their grandmother’s rooms and made inquiries about her health. On their way back to the garden, they reached a point where they had to take different roads. Pao-ch’ai then called out to Tai-yü. “P’in Erh!” she observed, “come with me; I’ve got a question to ask you.”

Tai-yü wended her steps therefore with Pao-ch'ai into the Heng Wu court. As soon as they entered the house, Pao-ch'ai threw herself into a seat. "Kneel down!" she smiled. "I want to examine you about something!"

Tai-yü could not fathom her object, and consequently laughed. "Look here." she cried, "this chit Pao has gone clean off her senses! What do you want to examine me about?"

Pao-ch'ai gave a sardonic smile. "My dear, precious girl, my dear maiden," she exclaimed, "what utter trash fills your mouth! Just speak the honest and candid truth, and finish!"

Tai-yü could so little guess her meaning that her sole resource was to smile. Inwardly, however, she could not help beginning to experience certain misgivings. "What did I say?" she remarked. "You're bent upon picking out my faults! Speak out and let me hear what it's all about!"

"Do you still pretend to be a fool?" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "When we played yesterday that game of wine-forfeits, what did you say? I really couldn't make out any head or tail."

Tai-yü, after a moment's reflection, remembered eventually that she had the previous day been guilty of a slip of the tongue and come out with a couple of passages from the 'Peony Pavilion,' and the 'Record of the West Side-house,' and, of a sudden, her face got scarlet with blushes. Drawing near Pao-ch'ai she threw her arms round her. "My dear cousin!" she smiled, "I really wasn't conscious of what I was saying! It just blurted out of my mouth! But now that you've called me to task, I won't say such things again."

"I've no idea of what you were driving at," Pao-ch'ai laughingly rejoined. "What I heard you recite sounds so thoroughly unfamiliar to me, that I beg you to enlighten me!"

"Dear cousin," pleaded Tai-yü, "don't tell anyone else! I won't, in the future, breathe such things again."

Pao-ch'ai noticed how from shame the blood rushed to her face, and how vehement she was in her entreaties, and she felt both to press her with questions; so pulling her into a seat to make her have a cup of tea, she said to her in a gentle tone, "Whom do you take me for? I too am wayward; from my youth up, yea

ever since I was seven or eight, I've been enough trouble to people! Our family was also what one would term literary. My grandfather's extreme delight was to be ever with a book in his hand. At one time, we numbered many members, and sisters and brothers all lived together; but we had a distaste for wholesome books. Among my brothers, some were partial to verses; others had a weakness for blank poetical compositions; and there were none of such works as the 'Western side-House,' and 'the Guitar,' even up to the hundred and one books of the 'Yüan' authors, which they hadn't managed to get. These books they stealthily read behind our backs; but we, on our part, devoured them, on the sly, without their knowing it. Subsequently, our father came to get wind of it; and some of us he beat, while others he scolded; burning some of the books, and throwing away others. It is therefore as well that we girls shouldn't know anything of letters. Men, who study books and don't understand the right principle, can't, moreover, reach the standard of those, who don't go in for books; so how much more such as ourselves? Even versifying, writing and the like pursuits aren't in the line of such as you and me. Indeed, neither are they within the portion of men. Men, who go in for study and fathom the right principles, should cooperate in the government of the empire, and should rule the nation; this would be a nobler purpose; but one doesn't now-a-days hear of the very existence of such persons! Hence, the study of books makes them worse than they ever were before. But it isn't the books that ruin them; the misfortune is that they make improper use of books! That is why study doesn't come up to ploughing and sowing and trading; as these pursuits exercise no serious pernicious influences. As far, however, as you and I go, we should devote our minds simply to matters connected with needlework and spinning; for we will then be fulfilling our legitimate duties. Yet, it so happens that we too know a few characters. But, as we can read, it behoves us to choose no other than wholesome works; for these will do us no harm! What are most to be shirked are those low books, as, when once they pervert the disposition, there remains no remedy whatever!"

While she indulged in this long rigmarole, Tai-yü lowered her head and sipped her tea. And though she secretly shared the same views on the subject, all the answer she gave her in assent was limited to one single word 'yes.' But at an unexpected moment, Su Yün appeared in the room. "Our lady Lien," she said, "requests the presence of both of you, young ladies, to consult with you in an important matter. Miss Secunda, Miss Tertia, Miss Quarta, Miss Shih and Mr. Pao, our master Secundus, are there waiting for you."

“What’s up again?” Pao-ch’ai inquired.

“You and I will know what it is when we get there,” Tai-yü explained.

So saying, she came, with Pao-ch’ai, into the Tao Hsiang village. Here they, in fact, discovered every one assembled. As soon as Li Wan caught sight of the two cousins, she smiled. “The society has barely been started,” she observed, “and here’s one who wants to give us the slip; that girl Quarta wishes to apply for a whole year’s leave.”

“It’s that single remark of our worthy senior’s yesterday that is at the bottom of it!” Tai-yü laughed. “For by bidding her execute some painting or other of the garden, she has put her in such high feather that she applies for leave!”

“Don’t be so hard upon our dear ancestor!” Pao-Ch’ai rejoined, a smile playing on her lips. “It’s entirely due to that allusion of grandmother Liu’s.”

Tai-yü speedily took up the thread of the conversation. “Quite so!” she smiled. “It’s all through that remark of hers! But of what branch of the family is she a grandmother? We should merely address her as the ‘female locust;’ that’s all.”

As she spoke, one and all were highly amused.

“When any mortal language finds its way into that girl Feng’s mouth,” Pao-ch’ai laughed, “she knows how to turn it to the best account! What a fortunate thing it is that that vixen Feng has no idea of letters and can’t boast of much culture! Her *forte* is simply such vulgar things as suffice to raise a laugh! Worse than her is that P’in Erh with that coarse tongue! She has recourse to the devices of the ‘Ch’un Ch’iu’! By selecting, from the vulgar expressions used in low slang, the most noteworthy points, she eliminates what’s commonplace, and makes, with the addition of a little elegance and finish, her style so much like that of the text that each sentence has a peculiar character of its own! The three words representing ‘female locust’ bring out clearly the various circumstances connected with yesterday! The wonder is that she has been so quick in devising them!”

After lending an ear to her arguments, they all laughed. “Those explanations of yours,” they cried, “show well enough that you are not below those two!”

“Pray, let’s consult as to how many days’ leave to grant her!” Li Wan proposed.

“I gave her a month, but she thinks it too little. What do you say about it?”

“Properly speaking,” Tai-yü put in, “one year isn’t much! The laying out of this garden occupied a whole year; and to paint a picture of it now will certainly need two years’ time. She’ll have to rub the ink, to moisten the pencils, to stretch the paper, to mix the pigments, and to….”

When she had reached this point, even Tai-yü could not restrain herself from laughing. “If she goes on so leisurely to work,” she exclaimed, “won’t she require two years’ time?”

Those, who caught this insinuation, clapped their hands and indulged in incessant merriment.

“Her innuendoes are full of zest!” Pao-ch’ai ventured laughingly. “But what takes the cake is that last remark about leisurely going to work, for if she weren’t to paint at all, how could she ever finish her task? Hence those jokes cracked yesterday were, sufficient, of course, to evoke laughter, but, on second thought, they’re devoid of any fun! Just you carefully ponder over P’in Erh’s words! Albeit they don’t amount to much, you’ll nevertheless find, when you come to reflect on them, that there’s plenty of gusto about them. I’ve really had such a laugh over them that I can scarcely move!

“It’s the way that cousin Pao-ch’ai puffs her up,” Hsi Ch’un observed “that makes her so much the more arrogant that she turns me also into a laughing-stock now!”

Tai-yü hastily smiled and pulled her towards her. “Let me ask you,” she said, “are you only going to paint the garden, or will you insert us in it as well?”

“My original idea was to have simply painted the garden,” Hsi Ch’un explained; “but our worthy senior told me again yesterday that a mere picture of the grounds would resemble the plan of a house, and recommended that I should introduce some inmates too so as to make it look like what a painting should. I’ve neither the knack for the fine work necessary for towers and terraces, nor have I the skill to draw representations of human beings; but as I couldn’t very well raise any objections, I find myself at present on the horns of a dilemma about it!”

“Human beings are an easy matter!” Tai-yü said. “What beats you are insects.”

“Here you are again with your trash!” Li Wan exclaimed. “Will there be any need to also introduce insects in it? As far, however, as birds go, it may probably be advisable to introduce one or two kinds!”

“If any other insects are not put in the picture,” Tai-yü smiled, “it won’t matter; but without yesterday’s female locust in it, it will fall short of the original?”

This retort evoked further general amusement. While Tai-yü laughed, she beat her chest with both hands. “Begin painting at once!” she cried. “I’ve even got the title all ready. The name I’ve chosen is, ‘Picture of a locust brought in to have a good feed.’”

At these words, they laughed so much the more heartily that at a time they bent forward, and at another they leant back. But a sound of “Ku tung” then fell on their ears, and unable to make out what could have dropped, they anxiously and precipitately looked about. It was, they found, Shih Hsiang-yün, who had been reclining on the back of the chair. The chair had, from the very outset, not been put in a sure place, and while indulging in hearty merriment she threw her whole weight on the back. She did not, besides, notice that the dovetails on each side had come out, so with a tilt towards the east, she as well as the chair toppled over in a heap. Luckily, the wooden partition-wall was close enough to arrest her fall, and she did not sprawl on the ground. The sight of her created more amusement than ever among all her relatives; so much so, that they could scarcely regain their equilibrium. It was only after Pao-yü had rushed up to her, and given her a hand and raised her to her feet again that they at last managed to gradually stop laughing.

Pao-yü then winked at Tai-yü. Tai-yü grasped his meaning, and, forthwith withdrawing into the inner room, she lifted the cover of the mirror, and looked at her face. She found the hair about her temples slightly dishevelled, so, promptly opening Li Wan’s toilet-case, and extracting a narrow brush, she stood in front of the mirror, and smoothed it down with a few touches. Afterwards, laying the brush in its place she stepped into the outer suite. “Is this,” she said pointing at Li Wan, “doing what you’re told and showing us how to do needlework and teaching us manners? Why, instead of that, you press us to come here and have a good romp and a hearty laugh!”

“Just you listen to her perverse talk,” Li Wan laughed. “She takes the lead and kicks up a rumpus, and incites people to laugh, and then she throws the blame

upon me! In real truth, she's a despicable thing! What I wish is that you should soon get some dreadful mother-in-law, and several crotchety and abominable older and younger sisters-in-law, and we'll see then whether you'll still be as perverse or not!"

Tai-yü at once became quite scarlet in the face, and pulling Pao-ch'ai, "Let us," she added, "give her a whole year's leave!"

"I've got an impartial remark to make. Listen to me all of you!" Pao-ch'ai chimed in. "Albeit the girl, Ou, may have some idea about painting, all she can manage are just a few outline sketches, so that unless, now that she has to accomplish the picture of this garden, she can lay a claim to some ingenuity, will she ever be able to succeed in effecting a painting? This garden resembles a regular picture. The rockeries and trees, towers and pavilions, halls and houses are, as far as distances and density go, neither too numerous, nor too few. Such as it is, it is fitly laid out; but were you to put it on paper in strict compliance with the original, why, it will surely not elicit admiration. In a thing like this, it's necessary to pay due care to the various positions and distances on paper, whether they should be large or whether small; and to discriminate between main and secondary; adding what is needful to add, concealing and reducing what should be concealed and reduced, and exposing to view what should remain visible. As soon as a rough copy is executed, it should again be considered in all its details, for then alone will it assume the semblance of a picture. In the second place, all these towers, terraces and structures must be distinctly delineated; for with just a trifle of inattention, the railings will slant, the pillars will be topsy-turvy, doors and windows will recline in a horizontal position, steps will separate, leaving clefts between them, and even tables will be crowded into the walls, and flower-pots piled on portières; and won't it, instead of turning out into a picture, be a mere caricature? Thirdly, proper care must also be devoted, in the insertion of human beings, to density and height, to the creases of clothing, to jupes and sashes, to fingers, hands, and feet, as these are most important details; for if even one stroke be not thoroughly executed, then, if the hands be not swollen, the feet will be made to look as if they were lame. The colouring of faces and the drawing of the hair are minor points; but, in my own estimation, they really involve intense difficulty. Now a year's leave is, on one hand, too excessive, and a month's is, on the other, too little; so just give her half a year's leave. Depute, besides, cousin Pao-yü to lend her a hand in her task. Not that cousin Pao knows how to give any hints about painting; that in itself would be more of a drawback; but in order that, in the event of there being

anything that she doesn't comprehend, or of anything perplexing her as to how best to insert it, cousin Pao may take the picture outside and make the necessary inquiries of those gentlemen, who excel in painting. Matters will thus be facilitated for her."

At this suggestion Pao-yü was the first to feel quite enchanted. "This proposal is first-rate!" he exclaimed. "The towers and terraces minutely executed by Chan Tzu-liang are so perfect, and the beauties painted by Ch'eng Jih-hsing so extremely fine that I'll go at once and ask them of them!"

"I've always said that you fuss for nothing!" Pao-ch'ai interposed. "I merely passed a cursory remark, and there you want to go immediately and ask for things. Do wait until we arrive at some decision in our deliberations, and then you can go! But let's consider now what would be best to use to paint the picture on?"

"I've got, in my quarters," Pao-yü answered, "some snow-white, wavy paper, which is both large in size, and proof against ink as well."

Pao-ch'ai gave a sarcastic smile. "I do maintain," she cried, "that you are a perfectly useless creature! That snow-white, wavy paper is good for pictures consisting of characters and for outline drawings. Or else, those who have the knack of making landscapes, use it for depicting scenery of the southern Sung era, as it resists ink and is strong enough to bear coarse painting. But were you to employ this sort of paper to make a picture of this garden on, it will neither stand the colours, nor will it be easy to dry the painting by the fire. So not only won't it be suitable, but it will be a pity too to waste the paper. I'll tell you a way how to get out of this. When this garden was first laid out, some detailed plan was used, which although executed by a mere house-decorator, was perfect with regard to sites and bearings. You'd better therefore ask for it of your worthy mother, and apply as well to lady Feng for a piece of thick glazed lustring of the size of that paper, and hand them to the gentlemen outside, and request them to prepare a rough copy for you, with any alterations or additions as might be necessary to make so as to accord with the style of these grounds. All that will remain to be done will be to introduce a few human beings; no more. Then when you have to match the azure and green pigments as well as the ground gold and ground silver, you can get those people again to do so for you. But you'll also have to bring an extra portable stove, so as to have it handy for melting the glue, and for washing your pencils, after you've taken the glue off. You further require

a large table, painted white and covered with a cloth. That lot of small dishes you have aren't sufficient; your pencils too are not enough. It will be well consequently for you to purchase a new set of each."

"Do I own such a lot of painting materials!" Hsi Ch'un exclaimed. "Why, I simply use any pencil that first comes under my hand to paint with; that's all. And as for pigments, I've only got four kinds, ochrey stone, 'Kuang' flower paint, rattan yellow and rouge. Besides these, all I have amount to a couple of pencils for applying colours; no more."

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" Pao-ch'ai remarked. "I've still got some of these things remaining. But you don't need them, so were I to give you any, they'd lie uselessly about. I'll put them away for you now for a time, and, when you want them, I'll let you have some. You should, however, keep them for the exclusive purpose of painting fans; for were you to paint such big things with them it would be a pity! I'll draw out a list for you to-day to enable you to go and apply to our worthy senior for the items; as it isn't likely that you people can possibly know all that's required. I'll dictate them, and cousin Pao can write them down!"

Pao-yü had already got a pencil and inkslab ready, for, fearing lest he might not remember clearly the various necessaries, he had made up his mind to write a memorandum of them; so the moment he heard Pao-ch'ai's suggestion, he cheerfully took up his pencil, and listened quietly.

"Four pencils of the largest size," Pao-ch'ai commenced, "four of the third size; four of the second size; four pencils for applying colours on big ground; four on medium ground; four for small ground; ten claws of large southern crabs; ten claws of small crabs; ten pencils for painting side-hair and eyebrows; twenty for laying heavy colours; twenty for light colours; ten for painting faces; twenty willow-twigs; four ounces of 'arrow head' pearls; four ounces of southern ochre; four ounces of stone yellow; four ounces of dark green; four ounces of malachite; four ounces of tube-yellow; eight ounces of 'kuang' flower; four boxes of lead powder; ten sheets of rouge; two hundred sheets of thin red-gold leaves; two hundred sheets of lead; four ounces of smooth glue, from the two Kuang; and four ounces of pure alum. The glue and alum for sizing the lustring are not included, so don't bother yourselves about them, but just take the lustring and give it to them outside to size it with alum for you. You and I can scour and clarify all these pigments, and thus amuse ourselves, and prepare them for use as

well. I feel sure you'll have an ample supply to last you a whole lifetime. But you must also get ready four sieves of fine lustring; a pair of coarse ones; four brush-pencils; four bowls, some large, some small; twenty large, coarse saucers; ten five-inch plates; twenty three-inch coarse, white plates; two stoves; four large and small earthenware pans; two new porcelain jars; four new water buckets; four one-foot-long bags, made of white cloth; two catties of light charcoal; one or two catties of willow-wood charcoal; a wooden box with three drawers; a yard of thick gauze, two ounces of fresh ginger; half a catty of soy; …"

"An iron kettle and an iron shovel," hastily chimed in Tai-yü with a smile full of irony.

"To do what with them?" Pao-ch'ai inquired.

"You ask for fresh ginger, soy and all these condiments, so I indent for an iron kettle for you to cook the paints and eat them." Tai-yü answered, to the intense merriment of one and all, who gave way to laughter.

"What do you, P'in Erh, know about these things?" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "I am not certain in my mind that you won't put those coarse coloured plates straightway on the fire. But unless you take the precaution beforehand of rubbing the bottom with ginger juice, mixed with soy, and of warming them dry, they're bound to crack, the moment they experience the least heat."

"It's really so," they exclaimed with one voice, after this explanation.

Tai-yü perused the list for a while. She then smiled and gave T'an Ch'un a tug. "Just see," she whispered, "we want to paint a picture, and she goes on indenting for a number of water jars and boxes! But, I presume, she's got so muddled, that she inserts a list of articles needed for her trousseau."

T'an Ch'un, at her remark, laughed with such heartiness, that it was all she could do to check herself. "Cousin Pao," she observed, "don't you wring her mouth? Just ask her what disparaging things she said about you."

"Why need I ask?" Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Is it likely, pray, that you can get ivory out of a cur's mouth?"

Speaking the while, she drew near, and, seizing Tai-yü, she pressed her down on

the stovecouch with the intention of pinching her face. Tai-yü smilingly hastened to implore for grace. “My dear cousin,” she cried, “spare me! P’in Erh is young in years; all she knows is to talk at random; she has no idea of what’s proper and what’s improper. But you are my elder cousin, so teach me how to behave. If you, cousin, don’t let me off, to whom can I go and address my entreaties?”

Little did, however, all who heard her apprehend that there lurked some hidden purpose in her insinuations. “She’s right there,” they consequently pleaded smilingly. “So much is she to be pitied that even we have been mollified; do spare her and finish!”

Pao-ch’ai had, at first, meant to play with her, but when she unawares heard her drag in again the advice she had tendered her the other day, with regard to the reckless perusal of unwholesome books, she at once felt as if she could not have any farther fuss with her, and she let her rise to her feet.

“It’s you, after all, elder cousin,” Tai-yü laughed. “Had it been I, I wouldn’t have let any one off.”

Pao-ch’ai smiled and pointed at her. “It is no wonder,” she said, “that our dear ancestor doats on you and that every one loves you. Even I have to-day felt my heart warm towards you! But come here and let me put your hair up for you!”

Tai-yü then, in very deed, swung herself round and crossed over to her. Pao-ch’ai arranged her coiffure with her hands. Pao-yü, who stood by and looked on, thought the style, in which her hair was being made up, better than it was before. But, of a sudden, he felt sorry at what had happened, as he fancied that she should not have let her brush her side hair, but left it alone for the time being and asked him to do it for her. While, however, he gave way to these erratic thoughts, he heard Pao-ch’ai speak. “We’ve done with what there was to write,” she said, “so you’d better tomorrow go and tell grandmother about the things. If there be any at home, well and good; but if not, get some money to buy them with. I’ll then help you both in your preparations.”

Pao-yü vehemently put the list away; after which, they all joined in a further chat on irrelevant matters; and, their evening meal over, they once more repaired into old lady Chia’s apartments to wish her good-night. Their grandmother had, indeed, had nothing serious the matter with her. Her ailment had amounted mainly to fatigue, to which a slight chill had been superadded, so that having

kept in the warm room for the day and taken a dose or two of medicine, she entirely got over the effects, and felt, in the evening, quite like own self again.

But, reader, the occurrences of the next day areas yet a mystery to you, but the nest chapter will divulge them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Having time to amuse themselves, the Chia inmates raise, when least expected, funds to celebrate lady Feng's birthday. In his ceaseless affection for Chin Ch'uen, Pao-yü uses, for the occasion, a pinch of earth as incense and burns it.

When Madame Wang saw, for we will now proceed with our narrative, that the extent of dowager lady Chia's indisposition, contracted on the day she had been into the garden of Broad Vista, amounted to a simple chill, that no serious ailment had supervened, and that her health had improved soon after the doctor had been sent for and she had taken a couple of doses of medicine, she called lady Feng to her and asked her to get ready a present of some kind for her to take to her husband, Chia Cheng. But while they were engaged in deliberation, they perceived a waiting-maid arrive. She came from their old senior's part to invite them to go to her. So, with speedy step, Madame Wang led the way for lady Feng, and they came over into her quarters.

"Pray, may I ask," Madame Wang then inquired, "whether you're feeling nearly well again now?"

"I'm quite all right to-day," old lady Chia replied. "I've tasted the young-pheasant soup you sent me a little time back and find it full of relish. I've also had two pieces of meat, so I feel quite comfortable within me."

"These dainties were presented to you, dear ancestor, by that girl Feng," Madame Wang smiled. "It only shows how sincere her filial piety is. She does not render futile the love, which you, venerable senior, ever lavish on her."

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head assentingly. "She's too kind to think of

me!” she answered smiling. “But should there be any more uncooked, let them fry a couple of pieces; and, if these be thoroughly immersed in wine, the congee will taste well with them. The soup is, it’s true, good, but it shouldn’t, properly speaking, be prepared with fine rice.”

After listening to her wishes, lady Feng expressed with alacrity her readiness to see them executed, and directed a servant to go and deliver the message in the cook-house.

“I sent the servant for you,” dowager lady Chia meanwhile said to Madame Wang with a smile, “not for anything else, but for the birthday of that girl Feng, which falls on the second. I had made up my mind two years ago to celebrate her birthday in proper style, but when the time came, there happened to be again something important to attend to, and it went by without anything being done. But this year, the inmates are, on one hand, all here, and there won’t, I fancy, be, on the other, anything to prevent us, so we should all do our best to enjoy ourselves thoroughly for a day.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Madame Wang rejoined, laughingly, “and, since it’s your good pleasure, venerable senior, why, shouldn’t we deliberate at once and decide upon something?”

“To the best of my recollection,” dowager lady Chia resumed smiling, “whenever in past years I’ve had any birthday celebrations for any one of us, no matter who it was, we have ever individually sent our respective presents; but this method is common and is also apt, I think, to look very much as if there were some disunion. But I’ll now devise a new way; a way, which won’t have the effect of creating any discord, and will be productive of good cheer.”

“Let whatever way you may think best, dear ancestor, be adopted.” Madame Wang eagerly rejoined.

“My idea is,” old lady Chia laughingly continued, “that we too should follow the example of those poor families and raise a subscription among ourselves, and devote the whole of whatever we may collect to meet the outlay for the necessary preparations. What do you say, will this do or not?”

“This is a splendid idea!” Madame Wang acquiesced. “But what will, I wonder, be the way adopted for raising contributions?”

Old lady Chia was the more inspirited by her reply. There and then she despatched servants to go and invite Mrs. Hsüeh, Madame Hsing and the rest of the ladies, and bade others summon the young ladies and Pao-yü. But from the other mansion, Chia Chen's spouse, Lai Ta's wife, even up to the wives of such stewards as enjoyed a certain amount of respectability, were likewise to be asked to come round.

The sight of their old mistress' delight filled the waiting-maids and married women with high glee as well; and each hurried with vehemence to execute her respective errand. Those that were to be invited were invited, and those that had to be sent for were sent for; and, before the lapse of such time as could suffice to have a meal in, the old as well as young, the high as well as low, crammed, in a black mass, every bit of the available space in the rooms.

Only Mrs. Hsüeh and dowager lady Chia sat opposite to each other. Mesdames Hsing and Wang simply seated themselves on two chairs, which faced the door of the apartment. Pao-ch'ai and her five or six cousins occupied the stovecouch. Pao-yü sat on his grandmother's lap. Below, the whole extent of the floor was crowded with inmates on their feet. But old lady Chia forthwith desired that a few small stools should be fetched. When brought, these were proffered to Lai Ta's mother and some other nurses, who were advanced in years and held in respect; for it was the custom in the Chia mansion that the family servants, who had waited upon any of the fathers or mothers, should enjoy a higher status than even young masters and mistresses. Hence it was that while Mrs. Yu, lady Feng and other ladies remained standing below, Lai Ta's mother and three or four other old nurses had, after excusing themselves for their rudeness, seated themselves on small stools.

Dowager lady Chia recounted, with a face beaming with smiles, the suggestions she had shortly made, for the benefit of the various inmates present; and one and all, of course, were only too ready to contribute for the entertainment. More, some of them, were on friendly terms with lady Feng, so they, of their own free will, adopted the proposal; others lived in fear and trembling of lady Feng, and these were only too anxious to make up to her. Every one, besides, could well afford the means, so that, as soon as they heard of the proposed subscriptions, they, with one consent, signified their acquiescence.

"I'll give twenty taels!" old lady Chia was the first to say with a smile playing round her lips.

“I’ll follow your lead, dear senior,” Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, “and also subscribe twenty taels.”

“We don’t presume to place ourselves on an equal footing with your ladyship,” Mesdames Hsing and Wang pleaded. “We, of course, come one degree lower; each of us therefore will contribute sixteen taels.”

“We too naturally rank one step lower,” Mrs. Yu and Li Wan also smiled, “so we’ll each give twelve taels.”

“You’re a widow,” dowager lady Chia eagerly demurred, addressing herself to Li Wan, “and have lost all your estate, so how could we drag you into all this outlay! I’ll contribute for you!”

“Don’t be in such high feather dear senior,” lady Feng hastily observed laughing, “but just look to your accounts before you saddle yourself with this burden! You’ve already taken upon yourself two portions; and do you now also volunteer sixteen taels on behalf of my elder sister-in-law? You may willingly do so, while you speak in the abundance of your spirits, but when you, by and bye, come to ponder over what you’ve done, you’ll feel sore at heart again! ‘It’s all that girl Feng that’s driven me to spend the money,’ you’ll say in a little time; and you’ll devise some ingenious way to inveigle me to fork out three or four times as much as your share and thus make up your deficit in an underhand way; while I will still be as much in the clouds as if I were in a dream!”

These words made every one laugh.

“According to you, what should be done?” dowager lady Chia laughingly inquired.

“My birthday hasn’t yet come,” lady Feng smiled; “and already now I’ve been the recipient of so much more than I deserve that I am quite unhappy. But if I don’t contribute a single cash, I shall feel really ill at ease for the trouble I shall be giving such a lot of people. It would be as well, therefore, that I should bear this share of my senior sister-in-law; and, when the day comes, I can eat a few more things, and thus be able to enjoy some happiness.”

“Quite right!” cried Madame Hsing and the others at this suggestion. So old lady Chia then signified her approval.

“There’s something more I’d like to add,” lady Feng pursued smiling. “I think that it’s fair enough that you, worthy ancestor, should, besides your own twenty taels, have to stand two shares as well, the one for cousin Liu, the other for cousin Pao-yü, and that Mrs. Hsüeh should, beyond her own twenty taels, likewise bear cousin Pao-ch’ai’s portion. But it’s somewhat unfair that the two ladies Mesdames Hsing and Wang should each only give sixteen taels, when their share is small, and when they don’t subscribe anything for any one else. It’s you, venerable senior, who’ll be the sufferer by this arrangement.”

Dowager lady Chia, at these words, burst out into a boisterous fit of laughter. “It’s this hussey Feng,” she observed, “who, after all, takes my side! What you say is quite right. Hadn’t it been for you, I would again have been duped by them!”

“Dear senior!” lady Feng smiled. Just hand over our two cousins to those two ladies and let each take one under her charge and finish. If you make each contribute one share, it will be square enough.”

“This is perfectly fair,” eagerly rejoined old lady Chia. “Let this suggestion be carried out!”

Lai Ta’s mother hastily stood up. “This is such a subversion of right,” she smiled, “that I’ll put my back up on account of the two ladies. She’s a son’s wife, on the other side, and, in here, only a wife’s brother’s child; and yet she doesn’t incline towards her mother-in-law and her aunt, but takes other people’s part. This son’s wife has therefore become a perfect stranger; and a close niece has, in fact, become a distant niece!”

As she said this, dowager lady Chia and every one present began to laugh. “If the junior ladies subscribe twelve taels each,” Lai Ta’s mother went on to ask, “we must, as a matter of course, also come one degree lower; eh?”

Upon hearing this, old lady Chia remonstrated. “This won’t do!” she observed. “You naturally should rank one degree lower, but you’re all, I am well aware, wealthy people; and, in spite of your status being somewhat lower, your funds are more flourishing than theirs. It’s only just then that you should be placed on the same standing as those people!”

The posse of nurses expressed with promptness their acceptance of the proposal their old mistress made.

“The young ladies,” dowager lady Chia resumed, “should merely give something for the sake of appearances! If each one contributes a sum proportionate to her monthly allowance, it will be ample!” Turning her head, “Yüan Yang!” she cried, “a few of you should assemble in like manner, and consult as to what share you should take in the matter. So bring them along!”

Yüan Yang assured her that her desires would be duly attended to and walked away. But she had not been absent for any length of time, when she appeared on the scene along with P’ing Erh, Hsi Jen, Ts’ai Hsia and other girls, and a number of waiting-maids as well. Of these, some subscribed two taels; others contributed one tael.

“Can it be,” dowager lady Chia then said to P’ing Erh, “that you don’t want any birthday celebrated for your mistress, that you don’t range yourself also among them?”

“The other money I gave,” P’ing Erh smiled, “I gave privately, and is extra.” “This is what I am publicly bound to contribute along with the lot.”

“That’s a good child!” lady Chia laughingly rejoined.

“Those above as well as those below have all alike given their share,” lady Feng went on to observe with a smile. “But there are still those two secondary wives; are they to give anything or not? Do go and ask them! It’s but right that we should go to the extreme length and include them. Otherwise, they’ll imagine that we’ve looked down upon them!”

“Just so!” eagerly answered lady Chia, at these words. “How is it that we forgot all about them? The only thing is, I fear, they’ve got no time to spare; yet, tell a servant-girl to go and ask them what they’ll do!”

While she spoke, a servant-girl went off. After a long absence, she returned. “Each of them,” she reported, “will likewise contribute two taels.”

Dowager lady Chia was delighted with the result. “Fetch a pen and inkslab,” she cried, “and let’s calculate how much they amount to, all together.”

Mrs. Yu abused lady Feng in a low tone of voice. “I’ll take you, you mean covetous creature, and … ! All these mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law have come forward and raised money to celebrate your birthday, and are you yet not

satisfied that you must also drag in those two miserable beings! But what do you do it for?”

“Try and talk less trash!” lady Feng smiled; also in an undertone. “We’ll be leaving this place in a little time and then I’ll square up accounts with you! But why ever are those two miserable? When they have money, they uselessly give it to other people; and isn’t it better that we should get hold of it, and enjoy ourselves with it?”

While she uttered these taunts, they computed that the collections would reach a sum over and above one hundred and fifty taels.

“We couldn’t possibly run through all this for a day’s theatricals and banquet!” old lady Chia exclaimed.

“As no outside guests are to be invited,” Mrs. Yu interposed, “and the number of tables won’t also be many, there will be enough to cover two or three days’ outlay! First of all, there won’t be anything to spend for theatricals, so we’ll effect a saving on that item.”

“Just call whatever troupe that girl Feng may say she likes best,” dowager lady Chia suggested.

“We’ve heard quite enough of the performances of that company of ours,” lady Feng said; “let’s therefore spend a little money and send for another, and see what they can do.”

“I leave that to you, brother Chen’s wife,” old lady Chia pursued, “in order that our girl Feng should have occasion to trouble her mind with as little as possible, and be able to enjoy a day’s peace and quiet. It’s only right that she should.”

Mrs. Yu replied that she would be only too glad to do what she could. They then prolonged their chat for a little longer, until one and all realised that their old senior must be quite fagged out, and they gradually dispersed.

After seeing Mesdames Hsing and Wang off, Mrs. Yu and the other ladies adjourned into lady Feng’s rooms to consult with her about the birthday festivities.

“Don’t ask me!” lady Feng urged. “Do whatever will please our worthy

ancestor."

"What a fine thing you are to come across such a mighty piece of luck!" Mrs. Yu smiled. "I was wondering what had happened that she summoned us all! Why, was it simply on this account? Not to breathe a word about the money that I'll have to contribute, must I have trouble and annoyance to bear as well? How will you show me any thanks?"

"Don't bring shame upon yourself!" lady Feng laughed. "I didn't send for you; so why should I be thankful to you! If you funk the exertion, go at once and let our venerable senior know, and she'll depute some one else and have done."

"You go on like this as you see her in such excellent spirits, that's why!" Mrs. Yu smilingly answered. "It would be well, I advise you, to pull in a bit; for if you be too full of yourself, you'll get your due reward!"

After some further colloquy, these two ladies eventually parted company.

On the next day, the money was sent over to the Ning Kuo Mansion at the very moment that Mrs. Yu had got up, and was performing her toilette and ablutions. "Who brought it?" she asked.

"Nurse Lin," the servant-girl said by way of response.

"Call her in," Mrs. Yu said.

The servant-girls walked as far as the lower rooms and called Lin Chih-hsiao's wife to come in. Mrs. Yu bade her seat herself on the footstool. While she hurriedly combed her hair and washed her face and hands, she wanted to know how much the bundle contained in all.

"This is what's subscribed by us servants." Lin Chih-hsiao's wife replied, "and so I collected it and brought it over first. As for the contributions of our venerable mistress, and those of the ladies, they aren't ready yet."

But simultaneously with this reply, the waiting-maids announced: "Our lady of the other mansion and Mrs. Hsüeh have sent over some one with their portions."

"You mean wenches!" Mrs. Yu cried, scolding them with a smile. "All the gumption you've got is to simply bear in mind this sort of nonsense! In a fit of

good cheer, your old mistress yesterday purposely expressed a wish to imitate those poor people, and raise a subscription. But you at once treasured it up in your memory, and, when the thing came to be canvassed by you, you treated it in real earnest! Don't you yet quick bundle yourselves out, and bring the money in! Be careful and give them some tea before you see them off."

The waiting-maids smilingly hastened to go and take delivery of the money and bring it in. It consisted, in all, of two bundles, and contained Pao-ch'ai's and Tai-yü's shares as well.

"Whose shares are wanting?" Mrs. Yu asked.

"Those of our old lady, of Madame Wang, the young ladies, and of our girls below are still missing," Lin Chih-hsiao's wife explained.

"There's also that of your senior lady," Mrs. Yu proceeded.

"You'd better hurry over, my lady," Lin Chih-hsiao's wife said; "for as this money will be issued through our mistress Secunda, she'll nobble the whole of it."

While conversing, Mrs. Yu finished arranging her coiffure and performing her ablutions; and, giving orders to see that the carriage was got ready, she shortly arrived at the Jung mansion. First and foremost she called on lady Feng. Lady Feng, she discovered, had already put the money into a packet, and was on the point of sending it over.

"Is it all there?" Mrs. Yu asked.

"Yes, it is," lady Feng smiled, "so you might as well take it away at once; for if it gets mislaid, I've nothing to do with it."

"I'm somewhat distrustful," Mrs. Yu laughed, "so I'd like to check it in your presence."

These words over, she verily checked sum after sum. She found Li Wan's share alone wanting. "I said that you were up to tricks!" laughingly observed Mrs. Yu. "How is it that your elder sister-in-law's isn't here?"

"There's all that money; and isn't it yet enough?" lady Feng smiled. "If there's

merely a portion short it shouldn't matter! Should the money prove insufficient, I can then look you up, and give it to you."

"When the others were present yesterday," Mrs. Yu pursued, "you were ready enough to act as any human being would; but here you're again to-day prevaricating with me! I won't, by any manner of means, agree to this proposal of yours! I'll simply go and ask for the money of our venerable senior."

"I see how dreadful you are!" lady Feng laughed. "But when something turns up by and bye, I'll also be very punctilious; so don't you then bear me a grudge!"

"Well, never mind if you don't give your quota!" Mrs. Yu smilingly rejoined. "Were it not that I consider the dutiful attentions you've all along shown me would I ever be ready to humour you?"

So rejoining, she produced P'ing Erh's share. "P'ing Erh, come here," she cried, "take this share of yours and put it away! Should the money collected turn out to be below what's absolutely required, I'll make up the sum for you."

P'ing Erh apprehended her meaning. "My lady," she answered, with a cheerful countenance, "it would come to the same thing if you were to first spend what you want and to give me afterwards any balance that may remain of it."

"Is your mistress alone to be allowed to do dishonest acts," Mrs. Yu laughed, "and am I not to be free to bestow a favour?"

P'ing Erh had no option, but to retain her portion.

"I want to see," Mrs. Yu added, "where your mistress, who is so extremely careful, will run through all the money, we've raised! If she can't spend it, why she'll take it along with her in her coffin, and make use of it there."

While still speaking, she started on her way to dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms. After first paying her respects to her, she made a few general remarks, and then betook herself into Yüan Yang's quarters where she held a consultation with Yüan Yang. Lending a patient ear to all that Yüan Yang; had to recommend in the way of a programme, and as to how best to give pleasure to old lady Chia, she deliberated with her until they arrived at a satisfactory decision. When the time came for Mrs. Yu to go, she took the two taels, contributed by Yüan Yang, and gave them back to her. "There's no use for these!" she said, and with these

words still on her lips, she straightway quitted her presence and went in search of Madame Wang.

After a short chat, Madame Wang stepped into the family shrine reserved for the worship of Buddha, so she likewise restored Ts'ai Yün's share to her; and, availing herself of lady Feng's absence, she presently reimbursed to Mrs. Chu and Mrs. Chao the amount of their respective contributions.

These two dames would not however presume to take their money back. "Your lot, ladies, is a pitiful one!" Mrs. Yu then expostulated. "How can you afford all this spare money! That hussey Feng is well aware of the fact. I'm here to answer for you!"

At these assurances, both put the money away, with profuse expressions of gratitude.

In a twinkle, the second day of the ninth moon arrived. The inmates of the garden came to find out that Mrs. Yu was making preparations on an extremely grand scale; for not only was there to be a theatrical performance, but jugglers and women storytellers as well; and they combined in getting everything ready that could conduce to afford amusement and enjoyment.

"This is," Li Wan went on to say to the young ladies, "the proper day for our literary gathering, so don't forget it. If Pao-yü hasn't appeared, it must, I presume, be that his mind is so preoccupied with the fuss that's going on that he has lost sight of all pure and refined things."

Speaking, "Go and see what he is up to!" she enjoined a waiting-maid; "and be quick and tell him to come."

The waiting-maid returned after a long absence. "Sister Hua says," she reported, "that he went out of doors, soon after daylight this morning."

The result of the inquiries filled every one with surprise. "He can't have gone out!" they said. "This girl is stupid, and doesn't know how to speak." They consequently also directed Ts'ui Mo to go and ascertain the truth. In a little time, Ts'ui Mo returned. "It's really true," she explained, "that he has gone out of doors. He gave out that a friend of his was dead, and that he was going to pay a visit of condolence."

“There’s certainly nothing of the kind,” T’an Ch’un interposed. “But whatever there might have been to call him away, it wasn’t right of him to go out on an occasion like the present one! Just call Hsi Jen here, and let me ask her!”

But just as she was issuing these directions, she perceived Hsi Jen appear on the scene. “No matter what he may have had to attend to to-day,” Li Wan and the rest remarked, “he shouldn’t have gone out! In the first place, it’s your mistress Secunda’s birthday, and our dowager lady is in such buoyant spirits that the various inmates, whether high or low, are coming from either mansion to join in the fun; and lo, he goes off! Secondly, this is the proper day as well for holding our first literary gathering, and he doesn’t so as apply for leave, but stealthily sneaks away.”

Hsi Jen heaved it sigh. “He said last night,” she explained, “that he had something very important to do this morning; that he was going as far as Prince Pei Ching’s mansion, but that he would hurry back. I advised him not to go; but, of course, he wouldn’t listen to me. When he got out of bed, at daybreak this morning, he asked for his plain clothes and put them on, so, I suppose, some lady of note belonging to the household of Prince Pei Ching must have departed this life; but who can tell?”

“If such be truly the case,” Li Wan and her companions exclaimed, “it’s quite right that he should have gone over for a while; but he should have taken care to be back in time !”

This remark over, they resumed their deliberations. “Let’s write our verses,” they said, “and we can fine him on his return.”

As these words were being spoken, they espied a messenger despatched by dowager lady Chia to ask them over, so they at once adjourned to the front part of the compound.

Hsi Jen then reported to his grandmother what Pao-yü had done. Old lady Chia was upset by the news; so much so, that she issued immediate orders to a few servants to go and fetch him.

Pao-yü had, in fact, been brooding over some affair of the heart. A day in advance he therefore gave proper injunctions to Pei Ming. “As I shall be going out of doors tomorrow at daybreak,” he said, “you’d better get ready two horses and wait at the back door! No one else need follow as an escort! Tell Li Kuei that

I’ve gone to the Pei mansion. In the event of any one wishing to start in search of me, bid him place every obstacle in the way, as all inquiries can well be dispensed with! Let him simply explain that I’ve been detained in the Pei mansion, but that I shall surely be back shortly.”

Pei Ming could not make out head or tail of what he was driving at; but he had no alternative than to deliver his message word for word. At the first blush of morning of the day appointed, he actually got ready two horses and remained in waiting at the back gate. When daylight set in, he perceived Pao-yü make his appearance from the side door; got up, from head to foot, in a plain suit of clothes. Without uttering a word, he mounted his steed; and stooping his body forward, he proceeded at a quick step on his way down the road. Pei Ming had no help but to follow suit; and, springing on his horse, he smacked it with his whip, and overtook his master. “Where are we off to?” he eagerly inquired, from behind.

“Where does this road lead to?” Pao-yü asked.

“This is the main road leading out of the northern gate.” Pei Ming replied. “Once out of it, everything is so dull and dreary that there’s nothing worth seeing!”

Pao-yü caught this answer and nodded his head. “I was just thinking that a dull and dreary place would be just the thing!” he observed. While speaking, he administered his steed two more whacks. The horse quickly turned a couple of corners, and trotted out of the city gate. Pei Ming was more and more at a loss what to think of the whole affair; yet his only course was to keep pace closely in his master’s track. With one gallop, they covered a distance of over seven or eight lis. But it was only when human habitations became gradually few and far between that Pao-yü ultimately drew up his horse. Turning his head round: “Is there any place here,” he asked, “where incense is sold?”

“Incense!” Pei Ming shouted, “yes, there is; but what kind of incense it is I don’t know.”

“All other incense is worth nothing,” Pao-yü resumed, after a moment’s reflection. “We should get sandalwood, conifer and cedar, these three.”

“These three sorts are very difficult to get,” Pei Ming smiled.

Pao-yü was driven to his wits’ ends. But Pei Ming noticing his dilemma, “What

do you want incense for?" he felt impelled to ask. "Master Secundus, I've often seen you wear a small purse, about your person, full of tiny pieces of incense; and why don't you see whether you've got it with you?"

This allusion was sufficient to suggest the idea to Pao-yü's mind. Forthwith, he drew back his hand and felt the purse suspended on the lapel of his coat. It really contained two bits of 'Ch'en Su.' At this discovery, his heart expanded with delight. The only thing that (damped his spirits) was the notion that there was a certain want of reverence in his proceedings; but, on second consideration, he concluded that what he had about him was, after all, considerably superior to any he could purchase, and, with alacrity, he went on to inquire about a censer and charcoal.

"Don't think of such things!" Pei Ming urged. "Where could they be procured in a deserted and lonely place like this? If you needed them, why didn't you speak somewhat sooner, and we could have brought them along with us? Would not this have been more convenient?"

"You stupid thing!" exclaimed Pao-yü. "Had we been able to bring them along, we wouldn't have had to run in this way as if for life!"

Pei Ming indulged in a protracted reverie, after which, he gave a smile. "I've thought of something," he cried, "but I wonder what you'll think about it, Master Secundus! You don't, I expect, only require these things; you'll need others too, I presume. But this isn't the place for them; so let's move on at once another couple of lis, when we'll get to the 'Water Spirit' monastery."

"Is the 'Water Spirit' monastery in this neighbourhood?" Pao-yü eagerly inquired, upon hearing his proposal. "Yes, that would be better; let's press forward."

With this reply, he touched his horse with his whip. While advancing on their way, he turned round. "The nun in this 'Water Spirit' monastery," he shouted to Pei Ming, "frequently comes on a visit to our house, so that when we now get there and ask her for the loan of a censer, she's certain to let us have it."

"Not to mention that that's a place where our family burns incense," Pei Ming answered, "she could not dare to raise any objections, to any appeal from us for a loan, were she even in a temple quite unknown to us. There's only one thing, I've often been struck with the strong dislike you have for this 'Water Spirit'

monastery, master, and how is that you're now, so delighted with the idea of going to it?"

"I've all along had the keenest contempt for those low-bred persons," Pao-yü rejoined, "who, without knowing why or wherefore, foolishly offer sacrifices to the spirits, and needlessly have temples erected. The reason of it all is, that those rich old gentlemen and unsophisticated wealthy women, who lived in past days, were only too ready, the moment they heard of the presence of a spirit anywhere, to take in hand the erection of temples to offer their sacrifices in, without even having the faintest notion whose spirits they were. This was because they readily credited as gospel-truth such rustic stories and idle tales as chanced to reach their ears. Take this place as an example. Offerings are presented in this 'Water Spirit' nunnery to the spirit of the 'Lo' stream; hence the name of 'Water Spirit' monastery has been given to it. But people really don't know that in past days, there was no such thing as a 'Lo' spirit! These are, indeed, no better than legendary yarns invented by Ts'ao Tzu-chien, and who would have thought it, this sort of stupid people have put up images of it, to which they offer oblations. It serves, however, my purpose to-day, so I'll borrow of her whatever I need to use."

While engaged in talking, they reached the entrance. The old nun saw Pao-yü arrive, and was thoroughly taken aback. So far was this visit beyond her expectations, that well did it seem to her as if a live dragon had dropped from the heavens. With alacrity, she rushed up to him; and making inquiries after his health, she gave orders to an old Taoist to come and take his horse.

Pao-yü stepped into the temple. But without paying the least homage to the image of the 'Lo' spirit, he simply kept his eyes fixed intently on it; for albeit made of clay, it actually seemed, nevertheless, to flutter as does a terror-stricken swan, and to wriggle as a dragon in motion. It looked like a lotus, peeping its head out of the green stream, or like the sun, pouring its rays upon the russet clouds in the early morn. Pao-yü's tears unwittingly trickled down his cheeks.

The old nun presented tea. Pao-yü then asked her for the loan of a censer to burn incense in. After a protracted absence, the old nun returned with some incense as well as several paper horses, which she had got ready for him to offer. But Pao-yü would not use any of the things she brought. "Take the censer," he said to Pei Ming, "and go out into the back garden and find a clean spot!"

But having been unable to discover one; “What about, the platform round that well?” Pei Ming inquired.

Pao-yü nodded his head assentingly. Then along with him, he repaired to the platform of the well. He deposited the censer on the ground, while Pei Ming stood on one side. Pao-yü produced the incense, and threw it on the fire. With suppressed tears, he performed half of the ceremony, and, turning himself round, he bade Pei Ming clear the things away. Pei Ming acquiesced; but, instead of removing the things, he speedily fell on his face, and made several prostrations, as his lips uttered this prayer: “I, Pei Ming, have been in the service of Master Secundus for several years. Of the secrets of Mr. Secundus’ heart there are none, which I have not known, save that with regard to this sacrifice to-day; the object of which, he has neither told me; nor have I had the presumption to ask. But thou, oh spirit! who art the recipient of these sacrificial offerings, must, I expect, unknown though thy surname and name be to me, be a most intelligent and supremely beautiful elder or younger sister, unique among mankind, without a peer even in heaven! As my Master Secundus cannot give vent to the sentiments, which fill his heart, allow me to pray on his behalf! Should thou possess spirituality, and holiness be thy share, do thou often come and look up our Mr. Secundus, for persistently do his thoughts dwell with thee! And there is no reason why thou should’st not come! But should’st thou be in the abode of the dead, grant that our Mr. Secundus too may, in his coming existence, be transformed into a girl, so that he may be able to amuse himself with you all! And will not this prove a source of pleasure to both sides?”

At the close of his invocation, he again knocked his head several times on the ground, and, eventually, rose to his feet.

Pao-yü lent an ear to his utterances, but, before they had been brought to an end, he felt it difficult to repress himself from laughing. Giving him a kick, “Don’t talk such stuff and nonsense!” he shouted. “Were any looker-on to overhear what you say, he’d jeer at you!”

Pei Ming got up and put the censer away. While he walked along with Pao-yü, “I’ve already,” he said, “told the nun that you hadn’t as yet had anything to eat, Master Secundus, and I bade her get a few things ready for you, so you must force yourself to take something. I know very well that a grand banquet will be spread in our mansion to-day, that exceptional bustle will prevail, and that you have, on account of this, Sir, come here to get out of the way. But as you’re, after

all, going to spend a whole day in peace and quiet in here, you should try and divert yourself as best you can. It won't, therefore, by any manner of means do for you to have nothing to eat."

"I won't be at the theatrical performance to have any wine," Pao-yü remarked, "so what harm will there be in my having a drink here, as the fancy takes me?"

"Quite so!" rejoined Pei Ming. "But there's another consideration. You and I have run over here; but there must be some whose minds are ill at ease. Were there no one uneasy about us, well, what would it matter if we got back into town as late as we possibly could? But if there be any solicitous on your account, it's but right, Master Secundus, that you should enter the city and return home. In the first place, our worthy old mistress and Madame Wang, will thus compose their minds; and secondly, you'll observe the proper formalities, if you succeed in doing nothing else. But even supposing that, when once you get home, you feel no inclination to look at the plays and have anything to drink, you can merely wait upon your father and mother, and acquit yourself of your filial piety! Well, if it's only a matter of fulfilling this obligation, and you don't care whether our old mistress and our lady, your mother, experience concern or not, why, the spirit itself, which has just been the recipient of your oblations, won't feel in a happy frame of mind! You'd better therefore, master, ponder and see what you think of my words!"

"I see what you're driving at!" Pao-yü smiled. "You keep before your mind the thought that you're the only servant, who has followed me as an attendant out of town, and you give way to fear that you will, on your return, have to bear the consequences. You hence have recourse to these grandiloquent arguments to shove words of counsel down my throat! I've come here now with the sole object of satisfying certain rites, and then going to partake of the banquet and be a spectator of the plays; and I never mentioned one single word about any intention on my part not to go back to town for a whole day! I've, however, already accomplished the wish I fostered in my heart, so if we hurry back to town, so as to enable every one to set their solicitude at rest, won't the right principle be carried out to the full in one respect as well as another?"

"Yes, that would be better!" exclaimed Pei Ming.

Conversing the while, they wended their way into the Buddhistic hall. Here the nun had, in point of fact, got ready a table with lenten viands. Pao-yü hurriedly

swallowed some refreshment and so did Pei Ming; after which, they mounted their steeds and retraced their steps homewards, by the road they had come.

Pei Ming followed behind. “Master Secundus!” he kept on shouting, “be careful how you ride! That horse hasn’t been ridden very much, so hold him in tight a bit.”

As he urged him to be careful, they reached the interior of the city walls, and, making their entrance once more into the mansion by the back gate, they betook themselves, with all possible despatch, into the I Hung court. Hsi Jen and the other maids were not at home. Only a few old women were there to look after the rooms. As soon as they saw him arrive, they were so filled with gratification that their eyebrows dilated and their eyes smiled. “O-mi-to-fu!” they said laughingly, “you’ve come! You’ve all but driven Miss Hua mad from despair! In the upper quarters, they’re just seated at the feast, so be quick, Mr. Secundus, and go and join them.”

At these words, Pao-yü speedily divested himself of his plain clothes and put on a coloured costume, reserved for festive occasions, which he hunted up with his own hands. This done, “Where are they holding the banquet?” he inquired.

“They’re in the newly erected large reception pavilion,” the old women responded.

Upon catching their reply, Pao-yü straightway started for the reception-pavilion. From an early moment, the strains of flageolets and pipes, of song and of wind-instruments faintly fell on his ear. The moment he reached the passage on the opposite side, he discerned Yü Ch’uan-erh seated all alone under the eaves of the verandah giving way to tears. As soon as she became conscious of Pao-yü‘s arrival, she drew a long, long breath. Smacking her lips, “Ai!” she cried, “the phoenix has alighted! go in at once! Hadn’t you come for another minute, every one would have been quite upset!”

Pao-yü forced a smile. “Just try and guess where I’ve been?” he observed.

Yü Ch’uan-erh twisted herself round, and, paying no notice to him, she continued drying her tears. Pao-yü had, therefore, no option but to enter with hasty step. On his arrival in the reception-hall, he paid his greetings to his grandmother Chia, to Madame Wang, and the other inmates, and one and all felt, in fact, as happy to see him back as if they had come into the possession of a

phoenix.

“Where have you been,” dowager lady Chia was the first to ask, “that you come back at this hour? Don’t you yet go and pay your congratulations to your cousin?” And smiling she proceeded, addressing herself to lady Feng, “Your cousin has no idea of what’s right and what’s wrong. Even though he may have had something pressing to do, why didn’t he utter just one word, but stealthily bolted away on his own hook? Will this sort of thing ever do? But should you behave again in this fashion by and bye, I shall, when your father comes home, feel compelled to tell him to chastise you.”

Lady Feng smiled. “Congratulations are a small matter?” she observed. “But, cousin Pao, you must, on no account, sneak away any more without breathing a word to any one, and not sending for some people to escort you, for carriages and horses throng the streets. First and foremost, you’re the means of making people uneasy at heart; and, what’s more, that isn’t the way in which members of a family such as ours should go out of doors!”

Dowager lady Chia meanwhile went on reprimanding the servants, who waited on him. “Why,” she said, “do you all listen to him and readily go wherever he pleases without even reporting a single word? But where did you really go?” Continuing, she asked, “Did you have anything to eat? Or did you get any sort of fright, eh?”

“A beloved wife of the duke of Pei Ching departed this life,” Pao-yü merely returned for answer, “and I went to-day to express my condolences to him. I found him in such bitter anguish that I couldn’t very well leave him and come back immediately. That’s the reason why I tarried with him a little longer.”

“If hereafter you do again go out of doors slyly and on your own hook,” dowager lady Chia impressed on his mind, “without first telling me, I shall certainly bid your father give you a caning!”

Pao-yü signified his obedience with all promptitude. His grandmother Chia was then bent upon having the servants, who were on attendance on him, beaten, but the various inmates did their best to dissuade her. “Venerable senior!” they said, “you can well dispense with flying into a rage! He has already promised that he won’t venture to go out again. Besides, he has come back without any misadventure, so we should all compose our minds and enjoy ourselves a bit!”

Old lady Chia had, at first, been full of solicitude. She had, as a matter of course, been in a state of despair and displeasure; but, seeing Pao-yü return in safety, she felt immoderately delighted, to such a degree, that she could not reconcile herself to visit her resentment upon him. She therefore dropped all mention of his escapade at once. And as she entertained fears lest he may have been unhappy or have had, when he was away, nothing to eat, or got a start on the road, she did not punish him, but had, contrariwise, recourse to every sort of inducement to coax him to feel at ease. But Hsi Jen soon came over and attended to his wants, so the company once more turned their attention to the theatricals. The play acted on that occasion was, “The record of the boxwood hairpin.” Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh and the others were deeply impressed by what they saw and gave way to tears. Some, however, of the inmates were amused; others were provoked to anger; others gave vent to abuse.

But, reader, do you wish to know the sequel? If so, the next chapter will explain it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

By some inscrutable turn of affairs, lady Feng begins to feel the pangs of jealousy. Pao-yü experiences joy, beyond all his expectations, when P’ing Erh (receives a slap from lady Feng) and has to adjust her hair.

But to resume our narrative. At the performance of the ‘Record of the boxwood hairpin,’ at which all the inmates of the household were present, Pao-yü and his female cousins sat together. When Lin Tai-yü noticed that the act called, ‘The man offers a sacrifice’ had been reached, “This Wang Shih-p’eng,” she said to Pao-ch’ai, “is very stupid! It would be quite immaterial where he offered his sacrifices, and why must he repair to the riverside? ‘At the sight of an object,’ the proverb has it, ‘one thinks of a person. All waters under the heavens revert but to one source.’ So had he baled a bowlful from any stream, and given way to his lamentations, while gazing on it, he could very well have satisfied his feelings.”

Pao-ch’ai however made no reply.

Pao-yü then turned his head round and asked for some warm wine to drink to lady Feng's health. The fact is, that dowager lady Chia had enjoined on them that this occasion was unlike others, and that it was absolutely necessary for them to do the best to induce lady Feng to heartily enjoy herself for the day. She herself, nevertheless, felt too listless to join the banquet, so simply reclining on a sofa of the inner room, she looked at the plays in company with Mrs. Hsüeh; and choosing several kinds of such eatables as were to her taste, she placed them on a small teapoy, and now helped herself to some, and now talked, as the fancy took her. Then allotting what viands were served on the two tables assigned to her to the elder and younger waiting-maids, for whom no covers were laid, and to those female servants and other domestics, who were on duty and had to answer calls, she urged them not to mind but to seat themselves outside the windows, under the eaves of the verandahs, and to eat and drink at their pleasure, without any regard to conventionalities. Madame Wang and Madame Hsing occupied places at the high table below; while round several tables outside sat the posse of young ladies.

"Do let that girl Feng have the seat of honour," old lady Chia shortly told Mrs. Yu and her contemporaries, "and mind be careful in doing the honours for me, for she is subjected to endless trouble from one year's end to another!"

"Very well," said Mrs. Yu. "I fancy," she went on to smile, "that little used as she is to filling the place of honour, she's bound, if she takes the high seat, to be so much at a loss how to behave, as to be loth even to have any wine!"

Dowager lady Chia was much amused by her reply. "Well, if you can't succeed," she said, "wait and I'll come and offer it to her."

Lady Feng with hasty step walked into the inner room. "Venerable ancestor!" she smiled, "don't believe all they tell you! I've already had several cups!"

"Quick, pull her out," old lady Chia laughingly cried to Mrs. Yu, "and shove her into a chair, and let all of you drink by turns to her health! If she then doesn't drink, I'll come myself in real earnest and make her have some!"

At these words, Mrs. Yu speedily dragged her out, laughing the while, and forced her into a seat, and, directing a servant to fetch a cup, she filled it with wine. "You've got from one year's end to another," she smiled, "the trouble and annoyance of conferring dutiful attentions upon our venerable senior, upon

Madame Wang and upon myself, so, as I've nothing to-day, with which to prove my affection for you, have a sip, from my hand, my own dear, of this cup of wine I poured for you myself!"

"If you deliberately wish to present me a glass," lady Feng laughed, "fall on your knees and I'll drink at once!"

"What's this you say?" Mrs. Yu replied with a laugh. "And who are you, I wonder? But let me tell you this once for all and finish that though we've succeeded, after ever so many difficulties, in getting up this entertainment to-day, there's no saying whether we shall in the future be able to have anything more the like of this or not. Let's avail ourselves then of the present to put our capacity to the strain and drink a couple of cups!"

Lady Feng saw very well that she could not advance any excuses, and necessity obliged her to swallow the contents of two cups. In quick succession, however, the various young ladies also drew near her, and lady Feng was constrained again to take a sip from the cup each held. But nurse Lai Ta too felt compelled, at the sight of dowager lady Chia still in buoyant spirits, to come forward and join in the merriment, so putting herself at the head of a number of nurses, she approached and proffered wine to lady Feng who found it once more so difficult to refuse that she had to swallow a few mouthfuls. But Yüan Yang and her companions next appeared, likewise, on the scene to hand her their share of wine; but lady Feng felt, in fact, so little able to comply with their wishes, that she promptly appealed to them entreatingly. "Dear sisters," she pleaded, "do spare me! I'll drink some more tomorrow!"

"Quite so! we're a mean lot," Yüan Yang laughed. "But now that we stand in the presence of your ladyship, do condescend to look upon us favourably! We've always enjoyed some little consideration, and do you put on the airs of a mistress on an occasion like the present, when there's such a crowd of people standing by? Really, I shouldn't have come. But, as you won't touch our wine, we might as well be quick and retire!"

While she spoke, she was actually walking away, when lady Feng hastened to lay hold of her and to detain her. "Dear sister," she cried, "I'll drink some and have done!"

So saying, she took the wine and filled a cup to the very brim, and drained it.

Yüan Yang then at length gave her a smile, (and she and her friends) dispersed.

Subsequently, the company resumed their places at the banquet. But lady Feng was conscious that the wine she had primed herself with was mounting to her head, so abruptly staggering to the upper end, she meant to betake herself home to lie down, when seeing the jugglers arrive, “Get the tips ready!” she shouted to Mrs. Yu. “I’m off to wash my face a bit.”

Mrs. Yu nodded her head assentingly; and lady Feng, noticing that the inmates were off their guard, left the banquet, and wended her steps beneath the eaves towards the back entrance of the house. P’ing Erh had, however, been keeping her eye on her, so hastily she followed in her footsteps. Lady Feng at once propped herself on her arm. But no sooner did they reach the covered passage than she discerned a young maid, attached to her quarters, standing under it. (The girl), the moment she perceived them, twisted herself round and beat a retreat. Lady Feng forthwith began to give way to suspicion; and she immediately shouted out to her to halt. The maid pretended at first not to hear, but, as, while following her they called out to her time after time, she found herself compelled to turn round. Lady Feng was seized with greater doubts than ever. Quickly therefore entering the covered passage with P’ing Erh, she bade the maid go along with them. Then opening a folding screen, lady Feng stated herself on the steps leading to the small courtyard, and made the girl fall on her knees. “Call two boy-servants from among those on duty at the second gate,” she cried out to P’ing Erh, “to bring a whip of twisted cords, and to take this young wench, who has no regard for her mistress, and beat her to shreds.”

The servant-maid fell into a state of consternation, and was scared out of her very wits. Sobbing the while, she kept on bumping her head on the ground and soliciting for grace.

“I’m really no ghost! So you must have seen me! Don’t you know what good manners mean and stand still?” lady Feng asked. “Why did you instead persist in running on?”

“I truly did not see your ladyship coming,” the maid replied with tears in her eyes. “I was, besides, much concerned as there was no one in the rooms; that’s why I was running on.”

“If there’s no one in the rooms, who told you to come out again?” lady Feng

inquired. “And didn’t you see me, together with P’ing Erh, at your heels, stretching out our necks and calling out to you about ten times? But the more we shouted, the faster you ran! You weren’t far off from us either, so is it likely that you got deaf? And are you still bent upon bandying words with me?”

So speaking, she raised her hand and administered her a slap on the face. But, while the girl staggered from the blow, she gave her a second slap on the other side of the face, so both cheeks of the maid quickly began to get purple and to swell.

P’ing Erh hastened to reason with her mistress. “My lady!” she said, “be careful you’ll be hurting your hand!”

“Go on, pommel her,” urged lady Feng, “and ask her what made her run! and, if she doesn’t tell you, just you take her mouth and tear it to pieces for her!”

At the outset, the girl obstinately prevaricated, but when she eventually heard that lady Feng intended to take a red-hot branding-iron and burn her mouth with, she at last sobbingly spoke out. “Our Master Secundus, Mr. Lien, is at home,” she remarked, “and he sent me here to watch your movements, my lady; bidding me go ahead, when I saw you leave the banquet, and convey the message to him. But, contrary to his hopes, your ladyship came back just now!”

Lady Feng saw very well that there lurked something behind all she said. “What did he ask you to watch me for?” she therefore eagerly asked. “Can it be, pray, that he dreaded to see me return home? There must be some other reason; so be quick and tell it to me and I shall henceforward treat you with regard. If you don’t minutely confess all to me, I shall this very moment take a knife and pare off your flesh!”

Threatening her the while, she turned her head round, and, extracting a hairpin from her coiffure, she stuck it promiscuously about the maid’s mouth. This so frightened the girl that, as she made every effort to get out of her way, she burst out into tears and entreaties. “I’ll tell your ladyship everything,” she cried, “but you mustn’t say that it was I who told you.”

Ping Erh, who stood by, exhorted her to obey; but she at the same time impressed on her mind to speak out without delay.

“Mr. Secundus himself arrived only a few minutes back,” the maid began. “The

moment, however, he came, he opened a bog, and, taking two pieces of silver, two hairpins, and a couple of rolls of silk, he bade me stealthily take them to Pao Erh's wife and tell her to come in. As soon as she put the things away, she hurried to our house, and Master Secundus ordered me to keep an eye on your ladyship; but of what happened after that, I've no idea whatever."

When these disclosures fell on lady Feng's ears, she flew into such a rage that her whole person felt quite weak; and, rising immediately, she straightway repaired home. The instant she reached the gate of the courtyard, she espied a waiting-maid peep out of the entrance. Seeing lady Feng, she too drew in her head, and tried at once to effect her escape. But lady Feng called her by name, and made her stand still. This girl had ever been very sharp, so when she realised that she could not manage to beat a retreat, she went so far as to run out to her. "I was just going to tell your ladyship," she smiled, "and here you come! What a strange coincidence!"

"Tell me what?" lady Feng exclaimed.

"That Mr. Secundus is at home," the girl replied, "and has done so and so." She then recounted to her all the incidents recorded a few minutes back.

"Ts'ui!" ejaculated lady Feng. "What were you up to before? Now, that I've seen you, you come and try to clear yourself!"

As she spoke, she raised her arm and administered the maid a slap, which upset her equilibrium. So with hurried step, she betook herself away. Lady Feng then drew near the window. Lending an ear to what was going on inside, she heard some one in the room laughingly observe: "When that queen-of-hell sort of wife of yours dies, it will be a good riddance!"

"When she's gone," Chia Lien rejoined, "and I marry another, the like of her, what will I again do?"

"When she's dead and gone," the woman resumed, "just raise P'ing Erh to the rank of primary wife. I think she'll turn out considerably better than she has."

"At present," Chia Lien put in, "she won't even let me enjoy P'ing Erh's society! P'ing Erh herself is full of displeasure; yet she dares not speak. How is it that it has been my fate to bring upon myself the influence of this evil star?"

Lady Feng overheard these criticisms and flew into a fit of anger, which made her tremble violently. When she, however, also caught the praise heaped by both of them upon P'ing Erh, she harboured the suspicion that P'ing Erh too must, as a matter of course, have all along employed the sly resentful language against her. And, as the wine bubbled up more and more into her head, she did not so much as give the matter a second thought, but, twisting round, she first and foremost gave P'ing Erh a couple of whacks, and, with one kick, she banged the door open, and walked in. Then, without allowing her any time to give any explanation in her own defence, she clutched Pao Erh's wife, and, tearing her about, she belaboured her with blows. But the dread lest Chia Lien should slip out of the room, induced her to post herself in such a way as to obstruct the doorway. "What a fine wench!" she shouted out abusingly. "You make a paramour of your mistress' husband, and then you wish to compass your master's wife's death, for P'ing Erh to transfer her quarters in here! You base hirelings! You're all of the same stamp, thoroughly jealous of me; you try to cajole me by your outward display!"

While abusing them, she once more laid hold of P'ing Erh and beat her several times. P'ing Erh was pummelled away till her heart thrilled with a sense of injury, but she had nowhere to go, and breathe her woes. Such resentment overpowered her feelings that she sobbed without a sign of a tear. "You people," she railingly shouted, "go and do a lot of shameful things, and then you also deliberately involve me; but why?"

So shouting, she too clutched Pao Erh's wife and began to assail her. Chia Lien had freely primed himself with wine, so, on his return home, he was in such exuberance of spirits that he observed no secresy in his doings. The moment, however, he perceived lady Feng appear on the scene, he got to his wits' end. Yet when he saw P'ing Erh also start a rumpus, the liquor he had had aroused his ire. The sight of the assault committed by lady Feng on Pao Erh's wife had already incensed him and put him to shame, but he had not been able with any consistency to interfere; but the instant he espied P'ing Erh herself lay hands on her, he vehemently jumped forward and gave her a kick. "What a vixen!" he cried. "Are you likewise going to start knocking people about?"

P'ing Erh was of a timid disposition. At once, therefore, she withheld her hands, and melted into tears. "Why do you implicate me," she said, "in things you say behind my back?"

When lady Feng descried in what fear and dread P'ing Erh was of Chia Lien, she lost more than ever control over her temper, and, starting again in pursuit of her, she struck P'ing Erh, while urging her to go for Pao Erh's wife.

P'ing Erh was driven to exasperation; and forthwith rushing out of the apartment, she went in search of a knife to commit suicide with. But the company of old matrons, who stood outside, hastened to place impediments in her way, and to argue with her.

Lady Feng, meanwhile, realised that P'ing Erh had gone to take her life, and rolling, head foremost, into Chia Lien's embrace, "You put your heads together to do me harm," she said, "and, when I overhear your designs, you people conspire to frighten me! But strangle me and have done."

Chia Lien was driven to despair; to such a degree that unsheathing a sword suspended on the wall, "There's no need for any one of you to commit suicide!" he screamed. "I too am thoroughly exasperated, so I'll kill the whole lot of you and pay the penalty with my own life! We'll all then be free from further trouble!"

The bustle had just reached a climax beyond the chance of a settlement, when they perceived Mrs. Yu and a crowd of inmates make their appearance in the room. "What's the matter?" they asked. "There was nothing up just now, so why is all this row for?"

At the sight of the new arrivals, Chia Lien more than ever made the three parts of intoxication, under which he laboured, an excuse to assume an air calculated to intimidate them, and to pretend, in order to further his own ends, that he was bent upon despatching lady Feng.

But lady Feng, upon seeing her relatives appear, got into a mood less perverse than the one she had been in previous to their arrival; and, leaving the whole company of them, she scampered, all in tears, over to the off side, into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

By this time, the play was over. Lady Feng rushed consequently into the old lady's presence and fell into her lap. "Venerable ancestor! help me!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Chia Lien wishes to kill me."

"What's up?" precipitately inquired dowager lady Chia, Mesdames Hsing and

Wang and the rest.

“I was just going to my rooms to change my dress,” lady Feng wept, “when I unexpectedly found Mr. Chia Lien at home, talking with some one. Fancying that visitors had come, I was quite taken aback, and not presuming to enter, I remained outside the window and listened. It turned out, in fact, to be Pao Erh’s wife holding council with him. She said that I was dreadful, and that she meant to poison me so as to get me out of the way and enable P’ing Erh to be promoted to be first wife. At this, I lost my temper. But not venturing, none the less, to have a row with him, I simply gave P’ing Erh two slaps; and then I asked him why he wished to do me harm. But so stricken did he get with shame that he tried there and then to despatch me.”

Dowager lady Chia treated every word that fell on her ear as truth. “Dreadful!” she ejaculated. “Bring here at once that low-bred offspring!”

Barely was, however, this exclamation out of her lips, than they perceived Chia Lien, a sword in hand, enter in pursuit of his wife, followed closely by a bevy of inmates. Chia Lien evidently placed such thorough reliance upon the love, which old lady Chia had all along lavished upon them, that he entertained little regard even for his mother or his aunt, so he came, with perfect effrontery, to stir up a disturbance in their presence. When Mesdames Hsing and Wang saw him, they got into a passion, and, with all despatch, they endeavoured to deter him from his purpose. “You mean thing!” they shouted, abusing him. “Your crime is more heinous, for our venerable senior is in here!”

“It’s all because our worthy ancestor spoils her,” cried Chia Lien, with eyes awry, “that she behaved as she did and took upon herself to rate even me!”

Madame Hsing was full of resentment. Snatching the sword from his grasp, she kept on telling him to quit the room at once. But Chia Lien continued to prattle foolish nonsense in a drivelling and maudlin way. His manner exasperated dowager lady Chia. “I’m well aware,” she observed, “that you haven’t the least consideration for any one of us. Tell some one to go and call his father here and we’ll see whether he doesn’t clear out.”

When Chia Lien caught these words, he eventually tottered out of the apartment. But in such a state of frenzy was he that he did not return to his quarters, but betook himself into the outer study.

During this while, Mesdames Hsing and Wang also called lady Feng to task.

“Why, what serious matter could it ever have been?” old lady Chia remarked. “But children of tender years are like greedy kittens, and how can one say for certain that they won’t do such things? Human beings have, from their very infancy, to go through experiences of this kind! It’s all my fault, however, for pressing you to have a little more wine than was good for you. But you’ve also gone and drunk the vinegar of jealousy!”

This insinuation made every one laugh.

“Compose your mind!” proceeded dowager lady Chia. “Tomorrow I’ll send for him to apologise to you; but, you’d better to-day not go over, as you might put him to shame!” Continuing, she also went on to abuse P’ing Erh. “I’ve always thought highly of that wench,” she said, “and how is it that she’s turned out to be secretly so bad?”

“P’ing Erh isn’t to blame!” Mrs. Yu and the others smiled. “It’s lady Feng who makes people her tools to give vent to her spite! Husband and wife could not very well come to blows face to face, so they combined in using P’ing Erh as their scapegoat! What injuries haven’t fallen to P’ing Erh’s lot! And do you, venerable senior, still go on blowing her up?”

“Is it really so!” exclaimed old lady Chia. “I always said that that girl wasn’t anything like that artful shrew! Well, in that case, she is to be pitied, for she has had to bear the brunt of her anger, and all through no fault of hers!” Calling Hu Po to her, “Go,” she added, “and tell P’ing Erh all I enjoin you; ‘that I know that she has been insulted and that tomorrow I’ll send for her mistress to make amends, but that being her mistress’ birthday to-day, I won’t have her give rise to any reckless fuss’!”

P’ing Erh had, we may explain, from an early hour, been dragged by Li Wan into the garden of Broad Vista. Here P’ing Erh gave way to bitter tears. So much so, that her throat choked with sobs, and could not give utterance to speech.

“You are an intelligent person,” exhorted her Pao-ch’ai, “and how considerately has your lady treated you all along! It was simply because she has had a little too much wine that she behaved as she did to-day! But had she not made you the means of giving vent to her spite, is it likely that she could very well have aired her grievances upon any one else? Besides, any one else would have laughed at

her for acting in a sham way!”

While she reasoned with her, she saw Hu Po approach, and deliver dowager lady Chia’s message. P’ing Erh then felt in herself that she had come out of the whole affair with some credit, and she, little by little, resumed her equilibrium. She did not, nevertheless, put her foot anywhere near the front part of the compound.

After a little rest, Pao Ch’ai and her companions came and paid a visit to old lady Chia and lady Feng, while Pao-yü pressed P’ing Erh to come to the I Hung court. Hsi Jen received her with alacrity. “I meant,” she said, “to be the first to ask you, but as our senior lady, Chia Chu, and the young ladies invited you, I couldn’t very well do so myself.”

P’ing Erh returned her smile. “Many thanks!” she rejoined. “How words ever commenced between us;” she then went on, “when there was no provocation, I can’t tell! But without rhyme or reason, I came in for a spell of resentment.”

“Our lady Secunda has always been very good to you,” laughingly remarked Hsi Jen, “so she must have done this in a sudden fit of exasperation!”

“Our lady Secunda did not, after all, say anything to me,” P’ing Erh explained. “It was that wench that blew me up. And she deliberately made a laughing-stock of me. But that fool also of a master of ours struck me!”

While recounting her experiences, she felt a keener sense of injustice than before, and she found it hard to restrain her tears from trickling down her cheeks.

“My dear sister,” Pao-yü hastily advised her, “don’t wound your heart! I’m quite ready to express my apologies on behalf of that pair!”

“What business is that of yours?” P’ing Erh smiled.

“We cousins, whether male or female, are all alike.” Pao-yü smilingly argued. “So when they hurt any one’s feelings, I apologise for them; it’s only right that I should do so. What a pity;” he continued, “these new clothes too have been stained! But you’ll find your sister Hua’s costumes in here, and why don’t you put one on, and take some hot wine and spurt it over yours and iron them out? You might also remake your coiffure.”

Speaking, he directed the young maids to draw some water for washing the face

and to heat an iron and bring it.

P’ing Erh had ever heard people maintain that all that Pao-yü excelled in was in knitting friendships with girls. But Pao-yü had so far been loth, seeing that P’ing Erh was Chia Lien’s beloved secondary wife, and lady Feng’s confidante, to indulge in any familiarities with her. And being precluded from accomplishing the desire upon which his heart was set, he time and again gave way to vexation. When P’ing Erh, however, remarked his conduct towards her on this occasion, she secretly resolved within herself that what was said of him was indeed no idle rumour. But as he had anticipated every one of her wants, and she saw moreover that Hsi Jen had, for her special benefit, opened a box and produced two articles of clothing, not much worn by her, she speedily drew near and washed her face.

Pao-yü stood by her side. “You must, dear girl, also apply a little cosmetic and powder,” she smiled; “otherwise you’ll look as if you were angry with lady Feng. It’s her birthday, besides; and our old ancestor has sent some one again to come and cheer you up.”

Hearing how reasonable his suggestions were, P’ing Erh readily went in search of powder; but she failed to notice any about, so Pao-yü hurriedly drew up to the toilet-table, and, removing the lid of a porcelain box made at the “Hsüan” kiln, which contained a set of ten small ladles, tuberose-like in shape, (for helping one’s self to powder with), he drew out one of them and handed it to P’ing Erh. “This isn’t lead powder,” he smiled. “This is made of the seeds of red jasmine, well triturated, and compounded with suitable first class ingredients.”

P’ing Erh emptied some on the palm of her hand. On examination, she really found that it was light, clear, red and scented; perfect in all four properties; that it was easy to apply evenly to the face, that it kept moist, and that it differed from other kinds of powder, ordinarily so rough. She subsequently noticed that the cosmetic too was not spread on a sheet, but that it was contained in a tiny box of white jade, the contents of which bore the semblance of rose-paste.

“The cosmetic one buys in the market isn’t clean;” Pao-yü remarked smilingly. “Its colour is faint as well. But this is cosmetic of superior quality. The juice was squeezed out, strained clear, mixed with perfume of flowers and decocted. All you need do is to take some with that hairpin and rub it on your lips, that will be enough; and if you dissolve some in a little water, and rub it on the palm of your hand, it will be ample for you to cover your whole face with.”

P’ing Erh followed his directions and performed her toilette. She looked exceptionally fresh and beautiful. A sweet fragrance pervaded her cheeks. Pao-yü then cut, with a pair of bamboo scissors, a stalk, with two autumn orchids, which had blossomed in a flower pot, and he pinned it in her side-hair. But a maid was unexpectedly seen to enter the room, sent by Li Wan to come and call her, so she quitted his quarters with all possible despatch.

Pao-yü had not so far been able to have his wishes to revel in P’ing Erh’s society gratified. P’ing Erh was furthermore a girl of a high grade, most intelligent, most winsome, and unlike that sort of vulgar and dull-minded beings, so that he cherished intense disgust against his fate.

The present occasion had been the anniversary of Chin Ch’uan-erh’s birth, and he had remained, in consequence, plunged in a disconsolate frame of mind throughout the whole day. But, contrary to his expectations, the incident eventually occurred, which afforded him, after all, an opportunity to dangle in P’ing Erh’s society and to gratify to some small degree a particle of his wish. This had been a piece of good fortune he so little expected would fall to his share during the course of his present existence, that as he reclined on his bed, his heart swelled with happiness and contentment. Suddenly, he reflected that Chia Lien’s sole thought was to make licentious pleasures the means of gratifying his passions, and that he had no idea how to show the least regard to the fair sex; and he mused that P’ing Erh was without father or mother, brothers or sisters, a solitary being destined to dance attendance upon a couple such as Chia Lien and his wife; that Chia Lien was vulgar, and lady Feng haughty, but that she was gifted nevertheless with the knack of splendidly managing things; and that (P’ing Erh) had again to-day come across bitter sorrow, and that her destiny was extremely unfortunate.

At this stage of his reverie, he began to feel wounded and distressed. When he rose once more to his feet, he noticed that the wine, which she had spurted on the clothes, she had a few minutes back divested herself of, had already half dried, and, taking up the iron, he smoothed them and folded them nicely for her. He then discovered that she had left her handkerchief behind, and that it still bore traces of tears, so throwing it into the basin, he rinsed it and hung it up to dry, with feelings bordering on joy as well as sadness. But after a short time spent in a brown study, he too betook himself to the Tao Hsiang village for a chat; and it was only when the lamps had been lit that he got up to take his leave.

P’ing Erh put up in Li Wan’s quarters for the night. Lady Feng slept with dowager lady Chia, while Chia Lien returned at a late hour to his home. He found it however very lonely. Yet unable to go and call his wife over, he had no alternative but to sleep as best he could for that night. On the morrow, he remembered, as soon as he opened his eyes, the occurrence of the previous day, and he fell a prey to such extreme unhappiness that he could not be conscience-stricken enough.

Madame Hsing pondered with solicitude on Chia Lien’s drunken fit the day before. The moment therefore it was light, she hastily crossed over, and sent for Chia Lien to repair to dowager lady Chia’s apartments. Chia Lien was thus compelled to suppress all timidity and to repair to the front part of the mansion and fall on his knees at the feet of his old senior.

“What was the matter?” inquired old lady Chia.

“I really had too much wine yesterday,” Chia Lien promptly answered with a forced smile. “I must have given you a fright, worthy ancestor, so I come to-day to receive condign punishment.”

“You mean fellow!” shouted dowager lady Chia, spitting at him disdainfully. “You go and glut yourself with spirits, and, not to speak of your not going to stretch yourself like a corpse and sleep it off, you contrariwise start beating your wife! But that vixen Feng brags away the whole day long, as if she were a human being as valiant as any tyrant, and yet yesterday she got into such a funk that she presented a woeful sight! Had it not been for me, you would have done her bodily harm; and what would you feel like now?”

Chia Lien was at heart full of a sense of injury, but he could not master sufficient courage to say anything in his own defence. The only course open to him was therefore to make a confession of fault.

“Don’t lady Feng and P’ing Erh possess the charms of handsome women?” dowager lady Chia resumed. “And aren’t you yet satisfied with them that you must, of a day, go slyly prowling and gallavanting about, dragging indiscriminately into your rooms frowsy and filthy people? Is it for the sake of this sort of wenches that you beat your wife and belabour the inmates of your quarters? You’ve nevertheless had the good fortune of starting in life as the scion of a great family; and do you, with eyes wide open, bring disgrace upon your

own head? If you have any regard for me, well, then get up and I'll spare you! And if you make your apologies in a proper manner to your wife and take her home, I'll be satisfied. But if you don't, just you clear out of this, for I won't even presume to have any of your genuflexions!"

Chia Lien took to heart the injunctions that fell on his ear. Espying besides lady Feng standing opposite to him in undress, her eyes swollen from crying, and her face quite sallow, without cosmetic or powder, he thought her more lovable and charming than ever. "Wouldn't it be well," he therefore mused, "that I should make amends, so that she and I may be on friendly terms again and that I should win the good pleasure of my old ancestor?"

At the conclusion of his reflections, he forthwith put on a smile. "After your advice, venerable senior," he said, "I couldn't be so bold as not to accede to your wishes! But this is shewing her more indulgence than ever!"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed dowager lady Chia laughingly. "I am well aware that with her extreme decorum she couldn't hurt any one's susceptibilities. But should she, in the future, wrong you in any way, I shall, of course, take the law into my own hands and bid you make her submit to your authority and finish."

Chia Lien, at this assurance, crawled up and made a bow to lady Feng. "It was really my fault, so don't be angry, lady Secunda," he said.

Every one in the room laughed.

"Now, my girl Feng," lady Chia laughingly observed, "you are not to lose your temper; for if you do, I'll lose mine too!"

Continuing, she directed a servant to go and call P'ing Erh; and, on her arrival, she advised lady Feng and Chia Lien to do all they could to reconcile her. At the sight of P'ing Erh, Chia Lien showed less regard than ever for the saying that 'a primary wife differs from a secondary wife,' and the instant he heard old lady Chia's exhortation he drew near her. "The injuries," he remarked, "to which you were subjected yesterday, Miss, were entirely due to my shortcoming. If your lady hurt your feelings, it was likewise all through me that the thing began. So I express my regret; but, besides this, I tender my apologies as well on behalf of your mistress."

Saying this, he made another bow. This evoked a smile from dowager lady Chia.

Lady Feng, however, also laughed. Their old ancestor then desired lady Feng to come and console P'ing Erh, but P'ing Erh hastily advanced and knocked her head before lady Feng. "I do deserve death," she urged, "for provoking your ladyship to wrath on the day of your birthday!"

Lady Feng was at the moment pricked by shame and remorse for having so freely indulged in wine the previous day as to completely have lost sight of longstanding friendships, and for allowing her temper to so thoroughly flare up as to lend a patient ear to the gossip of outsiders, and unjustly put P'ing Erh out of countenance, so when she contrariwise now saw her make advances, she felt both abashed and grieved, and, promptly extending her arms, she dragged her up and gave way to tears.

"I've waited upon your ladyship for all these years," P'ing Erh pleaded, "and you've never so much as given me a single fillip; and yet, you beat me yesterday. But I don't bear you any grudge, my lady, for it was that wench, who was at the bottom of it all. Nor do I wonder that your ladyship lost control over your temper."

As she spoke, tears trickled down her cheeks too.

"Escort those three home!" dowager lady Chia shouted to the servants. "If any one of them makes the least allusion to the subject, come at once and tell me of it; for without any regard as to who it may be, I shall take my staff and give him or her a sound flogging."

The trio then prostrated themselves before dowager lady Chia and the two ladies, Mesdames Hsing and Wang. And assenting to her old mistress' injunctions, an old nurse accompanied the three inmates to their quarters.

When they got home, lady Feng assured herself that there was no one about. "How is it," she next asked, "that I'm like a queen of hell, or like a 'Yakcha' demon? That courtesan swore at me and wished me dead; and did you too help her to curse me? If I'm not nice a thousand days, why, I must be nice on some one day! But if, poor me, I'm so bad as not even to compare with a disorderly woman, how can I have the face to come and spend my life with you here?"

So speaking, she melted into tears.

"Aren't you yet gratified?" cried Chia Lien. "Just reflect carefully who was most

to blame yesterday! And yet, in the presence of so many people, it was I who, after all, fell to-day on my knees and made apologies as well. You came in for plenty of credit, and do you now go on jabber, jabber? Can it be that you'd like to make me kneel at your feet before you let matters rest? If you try and play the bully beyond bounds, it won't be a good thing for you!"

To these arguments, lady Feng could find no suitable response.

P'ing Erh then blurted out laughing.

"She's all right again!" Chia Lien smiled. "But I'm really quite at a loss what to do with this one."

These words were still on his lips, when they saw a married woman walk in. "Pao Erh's wife has committed suicide by hanging herself," she said.

This announcement plunged both Chia Lien and lady Feng into great consternation. Lady Feng, however, lost no time in putting away every sign of excitement. "Dead, eh? What a riddance!" she shouted instead. "What's the use of making such a fuss about a mere trifle?"

But not long elapsed before she perceived Lin Chih-hsiao's wife make her appearance in the room. "Pao Erh's wife has hung herself," she whispered to lady Feng in a low tone of voice, "and her mother's relatives want to take legal proceedings."

Lady Feng gave a sardonic smile. "That's all right!" she observed. "I myself was just thinking about lodging a complaint!"

"I and the others tried to dissuade them," Lin Chih-hsiao's wife continued. "And by having recourse to intimidation as well as to promises of money, they, at last, agreed to our terms."

"I haven't got a cash," lady Feng replied. "Had I even any money, I wouldn't let them have it; so just let them go and lodge any charge they fancy. You needn't either dissuade them or intimidate them. Let them go and complain as much as they like. But if they fail to establish a case against me, they'll, after all, be punished for trying to make the corpse the means of extorting money out of me!"

Lin Chih-hsiao's wife was in a dilemma, when she espied Chia Lien wink at her.

Comprehending his purpose, she readily quitted the apartment and waited for him outside.

“I’ll go out and see what they’re up to!” Chia Lien remarked.

“Mind, I won’t have you give them any money!” shouted lady Feng.

Chia Lien straightway made his exit. He came and held consultation with Lin Chih-hsiao, and then directed the servants to go and use some fair means, others harsh. The matter was, however, not brought to any satisfactory arrangement until he engaged to pay two hundred taels for burial expenses. But so apprehensive was Chia Lien lest something might occur to make the relatives change their ideas, that he also despatched a messenger to lay the affair before Wang Tzu-t’eng, who bade a few constables, coroners and other official servants come and help him to effect the necessary preparations for the funeral. The parties concerned did not venture, when they saw the precautions he had adopted, to raise any objections, disposed though they may have been to try and bring forward other arguments. Their sole alternative therefore was to suppress their resentment, to refrain from further importunities and let the matter drop into oblivion.

Chia Lien then impressed upon Lin Chih-hsiao to insert the two hundred taels in the accounts for the current year, by making such additions to various items here and there as would suffice to clear them off, and presented Pao Erh with money out of his own pocket as a crumb of comfort, adding, “By and bye, I’ll choose a nice wife for you.” When Pao Erh, therefore, came in for a share of credit as well as of hard cash, he could not possibly do otherwise than practise contentment; and forthwith, needless to dilate on this topic, he began to pay court to Chia Lien as much as ever.

In the inner rooms, lady Feng was, it is true, much cut up at heart; but she strained every nerve to preserve an exterior of total indifference. Noticing that there was no one present in the apartment, she drew P’ing Erh to her. “I drank yesterday,” she smiled, “a little more wine than was good for me, so don’t bear me a grudge. Where did I strike you, let me see?”

“You didn’t really strike me hard!” P’ing Erh said by way of reply.

But at this stage they heard some one remark that the ladies and young ladies had come in.

If you desire, reader, to know any of the subsequent circumstances, peruse the account given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLV.

Friends interchange words of friendship. Tai-yü feels dull on a windy and rainy evening, and indites verses on wind and rain.

Lady Feng, we will now go on to explain, was engaged in comforting P'ing Erh, when upon unawares perceiving the young ladies enter the room, she hastened to make them sit down while P'ing Erh poured the tea.

"So many of you come to-day," lady Feng smiled, "that it looks as if you'd been asked to come by invitation."

T'an Ch'un was the first to speak. "We have," she smilingly rejoined, "two objects in view, the one concerns me; the other cousin Quarta; but among these are, besides, certain things said by our venerable senior."

"What's up?" inquired lady Feng with a laugh. "Is it so urgent?"

"Some time ago," T'an Ch'un proceeded laughingly, "we started a rhyming club; but the first meeting was not quite a success. Every one of us proved so soft-hearted! The rules therefore were set at naught. So I can't help thinking that we must enlist your services as president of the society and superintendent; for what is needed to make the thing turn out well is firmness and no favour. The next matter is: cousin Quarta explained to our worthy ancestor that the requisites for painting the picture of the garden were short of one thing and another, and she said: 'that there must still be,' she fancied, 'in the lower story of the back loft some articles, remaining over from previous years, and that we should go and look for them. That if there be any, they should be taken out, but that in the event of their being none, some one should be commissioned to go and purchase a supply of them.'"

"I'm not up to doing anything wet or dry, (play on word 'shih,' verses)," lady Feng laughed, "and would you have me, pray, come and gorge?"

“You may, it’s possible, not be up to any of these things,” T’an Ch’un replied, “but we don’t expect you to do anything! All we want you for is to see whether there be among us any remiss or lazy, and to decide how they should be punished, that’s all.”

“You shouldn’t try and play your tricks upon me!” lady Feng smiled, “I can see through your little game! Is it that you wish me to act as president and superintendent? No! it’s as clear as day that your object is that I should play the part of that copper merchant, who put in contributions in hard cash. You have, at every meeting you hold, to each take turn and pay the piper; but, as your funds are not sufficient, you’ve invented this plan to come and inveigle me into your club, in order to wheedle money out of me! This must be your little conspiracy!”

These words evoked general laughter. “You’ve guessed right!” they exclaimed.

“In very truth,” Li Wan smiled, “you’re a creature with an intellect as transparent as crystal, and with wits as clear as glass!”

“You’ve got the good fortune of being their elder sister-in-law,” lady Feng smilingly remarked, “so the young ladies asked you to take them in hand, and teach them how to read, and make them learn good manners and needlework; and it’s for you to guide and direct them in everything! But here they start a rhyming society, for which not much can be needed, and don’t you concern yourself about them? We’ll leave our worthy ancestor and our Madame Wang aside; they are old people, but you receive each moon an allowance of ten taels, which is twice as much as what any one of us gets. More, our worthy ancestor and Madame Wang maintain that being a widow, and having lost your home, you haven’t, poor thing, enough to live upon, and that you have a young child as well to bring up; so they added with extreme liberality another ten taels to your original share. Your allowance therefore is on a par with that of our dear senior. But they likewise gave you a piece of land in the garden, and you also come in for the lion’s share of rents, collected from various quarters, and of the annual allowances, apportioned at the close of each year. Yet, you and your son don’t muster, masters and servants, ten persons in all. What you eat and what your wear comes, just as ever, out of the general public fund, so that, computing everything together, you get as much as four to five hundred taels. Were you then to contribute each year a hundred or two hundred taels, to help them to have some fun, how many years could this outlay continue? They’ll very soon be getting married, and, are they likely then to still expect you to make any

contributions? So loth are you, however, at present to fork out any cash that you've egged them on to come and worry me! I'm quite prepared to spend away until we've drained our chest dry! Don't I know that the money isn't mine?"

"Just you listen to her," Li Wan laughed. "I simply made one single remark, and out she came with two cartloads of nonsensical trash! You're as rough a diamond as a leg made of clay! All you're good for is to work the small abacus, to divide a catty and to fraction an ounce, so finicking are you! A nice thing you are, and yet, you've been lucky enough to come to life as the child of a family of learned and high officials. You've also made such a splendid match; and do you still behave in the way you do? Had you been a son or daughter born in some poverty-stricken, humble and low household, there's no saying what a mean thing you wouldn't have been! Every one in this world has been gulled by you; and yesterday you went so far as to strike P'ing Erh! But it wasn't the proper thing for you to stretch out your hand on her! Was all that liquor, forsooth, poured down a cur's stomach? My monkey was up, and I meant to have taken upon myself to avenge P'ing Erh's grievance; but, after mature consideration, I thought to myself, 'her birthday is as slow to come round as a dog's tail grows to a point.' I also feared lest our venerable senior might be made to feel unhappy; so I did not come forward. Anyhow, my resentment isn't yet spent; and do you come to-day to try and irritate me? You aren't fit to even pick up shoes for P'ing Erh! You two should therefore change your respective places!"

These taunts created merriment among the whole party.

"Oh!" hastily exclaimed lady Feng, laughingly, "I know everything! You don't at all come to look me up on account of verses or paintings, but simply to take revenge on P'ing Erh's behalf! I never had any idea that P'ing Erh had such a backer as yourself to bolster her up! Had I known it, I wouldn't have ventured to strike her, even though a spirit had been tugging my arm! Miss P'ing come over and let me tender my apologies to you, in the presence of your senior lady and the young ladies. Do bear with me for having proved so utterly wanting in virtue, after I had had a few drinks!"

Every one felt amused by her insinuations.

"What do you say?" Li Wan asked P'ing Erh smiling. "As for me, I think it my bounden duty to vindicate your wrongs, before we let the matter drop!"

“Your remarks, ladies, may be spoken in jest,” P’ing Erh smiled, “but I am not worthy of such a fuss!”

“What about worthy and unworthy?” Li Wan observed. “I’m here for you! Quick, get the key, and let your mistress go and open the doors and hunt up the things!”

“Dear sister-in-law,” lady Feng said with a smile, “you’d better go along with them into the garden. I’m about to take the rice accounts in hand and square them up with them. Our senior lady, Madame Hsing, has also sent some one to call me; what she wants to tell me again, I can’t make out; but I must need go over for a turn. There are, besides, all those extra clothes for you people to wear at the end of the year, and I must get them ready and give them to be made!”

“These matters are none of my business!” Li Wan laughingly answered. “First settle my concerns so as to enable me to retire to rest, and escape the bother of having all these girls at me!”

“Dear sister-in-law,” vehemently smiled lady Feng, “be good enough to give me a little time! You’ve ever been the one to love me best, and how is it that you have, on P’ing Erh’s account, ceased to care for me? Time and again have you impressed on my mind that I should, despite my manifold duties, take good care of my health, and manage things in such a way as to find a little leisure for rest, and do you now contrariwise come to press the very life out of me? There’s another thing besides. Should such clothes as will be required at the end of the year by any other persons be delayed, it won’t matter; but, should those of the young ladies be behind time, let the responsibility rest upon your shoulders! And won’t our old lady bear you a grudge, if you don’t mind these small things? But as for me, I won’t utter a single word against you, for, as I had rather bear the blame myself, I won’t venture, to involve you!”

“Listen to her!” Li Wan smiled. “Hasn’t she got the gift of the gab? But let me ask you. Will you, after all, assume the control of this rhyming society or not?”

“What’s this nonsense you’re talking?” lady Feng laughed. “Were I not to enter the society, and spend a little money, won’t I be treated as a rebel in this garden of Broad Vista? And will I then still think of tarrying here to eat my head off? So soon as the day dawns tomorrow, I’ll arrive at my post, dismount from my horse, and, after kneeling before the seals, my first act will be to give fifty taels for you

to quietly cover the expenses of your meetings. Yet after a few days, I shall neither indite any verses, nor write any compositions, as I am simply a rustic boor, nothing more! But it will be just the same whether I assume the direction or not; for after you pocket my money, there's no fear of your not driving me out of the place!"

As these words dropped from her lips, one and all laughed again.

"I'll now open the loft," proceeded lady Feng. "Should there be any of the articles you want, you can tell the servants to bring them out for you to look at them! If any will serve your purpose, keep them and use them. If any be short, I'll bid a servant go and purchase them according to your list. I'll go at once and cut the satin for the painting. As for the plan, it isn't with Madame Wang; it's still over there, at Mr. Chia Chen's. I tell you all this so that you should avoid going over to Madame Wang's and getting into trouble! But I'll go and depute some one to fetch it. I'll direct also a servant to take the satin and give it to the gentlemen to size with alum; will this be all right?"

Li Wan nodded her head by way of assent and smiled. "This will be putting you to much trouble and inconvenience," she said. "But we must really act as you suggest. Well in that case, go home all of you, and, if after a time, she doesn't send the thing round, you can come again and bully her."

So saying, she there and then led off the young ladies, and was making her way out, when lady Feng exclaimed: "It's Pao-yü and he alone, who has given rise to all this fuss."

Li Wan overheard her remark and hastily turned herself round. "We did, in fact, come over," she smiled, "on account of Pao-yü, and we forgot, instead all about him! The first meeting was deferred through him; but we are too soft-hearted, so tell us what penalty to inflict on him!"

Lady Feng gave herself to reflection. "There's only one thing to do," she then remarked. "Just punish him by making him sweep the floor of each of your rooms. This will do!"

"Your verdict is faultless!" they laughed with one accord.

While they conversed they were on the point of starting on their way back, when they caught sight of a young maid walk in, supporting nurse Lai. Lady Feng and

her companions immediately rose to their feet, their faces beaming with smiles. “Venerable mother!” they said, “do take a seat!” They then in a body presented their congratulations to her.

Nurse Lai seated herself on the edge of the stovecouch and returned their smiles. “I’m to be congratulated,” she rejoined, “but you, mistresses, are to be congratulated as well; for had it had not been for the bountiful grace displaced by you, mistresses, whence would this joy of mine have come? Your ladyship sent Ts’ai Ko again yesterday to bring me presents, but my grandson *kotowed* at the door, with his face turned towards the upper quarters.”

“When is he going to his post?” Li Wan inquired, with a smile.

Nurse Lai heaved a sigh. “How can I interfere with them?” she answered. “Why, I let them have their own way and start when they like! The other day, they were at my house, and they prostrated themselves before me; but I could find no complimentary remark to make to him, so, ‘Sir!’ I said, ‘putting aside that you’re an official, you’ve lived in a reckless and dissolute way, for now thirty years. You should, it’s true, have been people’s bond-servant, but from the moment you came out of your mother’s womb, your master graciously accorded you your liberty. Thanks, above, to the boundless blessings showered upon you by your lord, and, below, to the favour of your father and mother, you’re like a noble scion and a gentleman, able to read and to write; and you have been carried about by maids, old matrons, and nurses, just as if you had been a very phoenix! But now that you’ve grown up and reached this age, do you have the faintest notion of what the two words ‘bond-servant’ imply? All you think of is to enjoy your benefits. But what hardships your grandfather and father had to bear, in slaving away for two or three generations, before they succeeded, after ever so many ups and downs, in raising up a thing like you, you don’t at all know! From your very infancy, you ever ailed from this, or sickened for that, so that the money that was expended on your behalf, would suffice to fuse into a lifelike silver image of you! At the age of twenty, you again received the bounty of your master in the shape of a promise to purchase official status for you. But just mark, how many inmates of the principal branch and main offspring have to endure privation, and suffer the pangs of hunger! So beware you, who are the offshoot of a bond-servant, lest you snap your happiness! After enjoying so many good things for a decade, by the help of what spirits, and the agency of what devils have you, I wonder, managed to so successfully entreat your master as to induce him to bring you to the fore again and select you for office?

Magistrates may be minor officials, but their functions are none the less onerous. In whatever district they obtain a post, they become the father and mother of that particular locality. If you therefore don't mind your business, and look after your duties in such a way as to acquit yourself of your loyal obligations, to prove your gratitude to the state and to show obedience and reverence to your lord, heaven, I fear, will not even bear with you!'"

Li Wan and lady Feng laughed. "You're too full of misgivings!" they observed. "From what we can see of him, he's all right! Some years back, he paid us a visit or two; but it's many years now that he hasn't put his foot here. At the close of each year, and on birthdays, we've simply seen his name brought in, that's all. The other day, that he came to knock his head before our venerable senior and Madame Wang, we caught sight of him in her courtyard yonder; and, got up in the uniform of his new office, he looked so dignified, and stouter too than before. Now that he has got this post, you should be quite happy; instead of that you worry and fret about this and that! If he does get bad, why, he has his father and mother yet to take care of him, so all you need do is to be cheerful and content! When you've got time to spare, do get into a chair and come in and have a game of cards and a chat with our worthy senior; and who ever will have the face to hurt your feelings? Why, were you go to your home, you'd also have there houses and halls, and who is there who would not hold you in high respect? You're certainly, what one would call, a venerable old dame!"

P'ing Erh poured a cup of tea and brought it to her. Nurse Lai speedily stood up. "You could have asked any girl to do this for me; it wouldn't have mattered! But here I'm troubling you again!"

Apologising, she resumed, sipping her tea the while: "My lady you're not aware that young girls of this age must be in everything kept strictly in hand. In the event of any license, they're sure to find time to kick up trouble, and annoy their elders. Those, who know (how well they are supervised), will then say that children are always up to mischief. But those, who don't, will maintain that they take advantage of their wealthy position to despise people; to the detriment as well of their mistresses' reputation. How I regret that there's nothing that I can do with him. Time after time, have I had to send for his father; and he has been the better, after a scolding from him." Pointing at Pao-yü, "I don't mind whether you feel angry with me for what I'm going to say," she proceeded, "but if your father were to attempt now to exercise ever so little control over you, your venerable grandmother is sure to try and screen you. Yet, when in days gone by

your worthy father was young, he used to be beaten by your grandfather. Who hasn't seen him do it? But did your father, in his youth resemble you, who have neither fear for God or man? There was also our senior master, on the other side, Mr. Chia She. He was, I admit, wild; but never such a crossgrained fellow as yourself; and yet he too had his daily dose of the whip. There was besides the father of your elder cousin Chen, of the eastern mansion. He had a disposition that flared up like a fire over which oil is poured. If anything was said, and he flew into a rage, why, talk about a son, it was really as if he tortured a robber. From all I can now see and hear, Mr. Chen keeps his son in check just as much as was the custom in old days among his ancestors; the only thing is that he abides by it in some respects, but not in others. Besides, he doesn't exercise the least restraint over his own self, so is it to be wondered at if all his cousins and nieces don't respect him? If you've got any sense about you, you'll only be too glad that I speak to you in this wise; but if you haven't, you mayn't be very well able to say anything openly to me, but you'll inwardly abuse me, who knows to what extent!"

As she reproved him, they saw Lai Ta's wife arrive. In close succession came Chou Jui's wife along with Chang Ts'ai's wife to report various matters.

"A wife," laughed lady Feng, "has come to fetch her mother-in-law!"

"I haven't come to fetch our old dame," Lai Ta's wife smilingly rejoined, "but to inquire whether you, my lady and the young ladies, will confer upon us the honour of your company?"

When nurse Lai caught this remark, she smiled. "I've really grown quite idiotic!" "What," she exclaimed, "was right and proper for me to say, I didn't say, but I went on talking instead a lot of rot and rubbish! As our relatives and friends are presenting their congratulations to our grandson for having been selected to fill up that office of his, we find ourselves under the necessity of giving a banquet at home. But I was thinking that it wouldn't do, if we kept a feast going the whole day, and we invited this one, and not that one. Reflecting also that it was thanks to our master's vast bounty that we've come in for this unforeseen glory and splendour, I felt quite agreeable to do anything, even though it may entail the collapse of our household. I therefore advised his father to give banquets on three consecutive days. That he should, on the first, put up several tables, and a stage in our mean garden, and invite your venerable dowager lady, the senior ladies, junior ladies, and young ladies to come and have

some distraction during the day, and that he should have several tables laid on the stage in the main pavilion outside, and request the senior and junior gentlemen to confer upon us the lustre of their presence. That for the second day, we should ask our relatives and friends; and that for the third, we should invite our companions from the two mansions. In this way, we'll have three days' excitement, and, by the boundless favour of our master, we'll have the benefit of enjoying the honour of your society."

"When is it to be?" Li Wan and lady Feng inquired, smilingly. "As far as we are concerned, we'll feel it our duty to come. And we hope that our worthy senior may feel in the humour to go. But there's no saying for certain!"

"The day chosen is the fourteenth," Lai Ta's wife eagerly replied. "Just come for the sake of our old mother-in-law!"

"I can't tell about the others," lady Feng explained with a laugh, "but as for me I shall positively come. I must however tell you beforehand that I've no congratulatory presents to give you. Nor do I know anything about tips to players or others. As soon as I shall have done eating, I shall bolt, so don't laugh at me."

"Fiddlesticks!" Lai Ta's wife laughed. "Were your ladyship disposed, you could well afford to give us twenty and thirty thousand taels."

"I'm off now to invite our venerable mistress," nurse Lai smilingly remarked. "And if her ladyship also agrees to come, I shall deem it a greater honour than ever conferred upon me."

Having said this, she went on to issue some injunctions; after which, she got up to go, when the sight of Chou Jui's wife reminded her of something.

"Of course!" she consequently observed. "I've got one more question to ask you, my lady. What did sister-in-law Chou's son do to incur blame, that he was packed off, and his services dispensed with?"

"I was just about to tell your daughter-in-law," lady Feng answered smilingly, after listening to her question, "but with so many things to preoccupy me, it slipped from my memory! When you get home, sister-in-law Lai, explain to that old husband of yours that we won't have his, (Chou Jui's), son kept in either of the mansions; and that he can tell him to go about his own business!"

Lai Ta’s wife had no option but to express her acquiescence. Chou Jui’s wife however speedily fell on her knees and gave way to urgent entreaties.

“What is it all about?” nurse Lai shouted. “Tell me and let me determine the right and wrong of the question.”

“The other day,” lady Feng observed, “that my birthday was celebrated, that young fellow of his got drunk, before the wine ever went round; and when the old dame, over there, sent presents, he didn’t go outside to give a helping hand, but squatted down, instead, and upbraided people. Even the presents he wouldn’t carry inside. And it was only after the two girls had come indoors that he eventually got the servant-lads and brought them in. Those lads were however careful enough in what they did, but as for him, he let the box, he held, slip from his hands, and bestrewed the whole courtyard with cakes. When every one had left, I deputed Ts’ai Ming to go and talk to him; but he then turned round and gave Ts’ai Ming a regular scolding. So what’s the use of not bundling off a disorderly rascal like him, who neither shows any regard for discipline or heaven?”

“I was wondering what it could be!” nurse Lai ventured. “Was it really about this? My lady, listen to me! If he has done anything wrong, thrash him and scold him, until you make him mend his ways, and finish with it! But to drive him out of the place, will never, by any manner of means, do. He isn’t, besides, to be treated like a child born in our household. He is at present employed as Madame Wang’s attendant, so if you carry out your purpose of expelling him, her ladyship’s face will be put to the blush. My idea is that you should, my lady, give him a lesson by letting him have several whacks with a cane so as to induce him to abstain from wine in the future. If you then retain him in your service as hitherto he’ll be all right! If you don’t do it for his mother’s sake; do it at least for that of Madame Wang!”

After lending an ear to her arguments, lady Feng addressed herself to Lai Ta’s wife. “Well, in that case,” she said, “call him over tomorrow and give him forty blows; and don’t let him after this touch any more wine!”

Lai Ta’s wife promised to execute her directions. Chou Jui’s wife then kotowed and rose to her feet. But she also persisted upon prostrating herself before nurse Lai; and only desisted when Lai Ta’s wife pulled her up. But presently the trio took their departure, and Li Wan and her companions sped back into the garden.

When evening came, lady Feng actually bade the servants go and look (into the loft), and when they discovered a lot of painting materials, which had been put away long ago, they brought them into the garden. Pao-ch'ai and her friends then selected such as they deemed suitable. But as they only had as yet half the necessaries they required, they drew out a list of the other half and sent it to lady Feng, who, needless for us to particularise, had the different articles purchased, according to the specimens supplied.

By a certain day, the silk had been sized outside, a rough sketch drawn, and both returned into the garden. Pao-yü therefore was day after day to be found over at Hsi Ch'un's, doing his best to help her in her hard work. But T'an Ch'un, Li Wan, Ying Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls likewise congregated in her quarters, and sat with her when they were at leisure, as they could, in the first place, watch the progress of the painting, and as secondly they were able to conveniently see something of each other.

When Pao-ch'ai perceived how cool and pleasant the weather was getting, and how the nights were beginning again to gradually draw out, she came and found her mother, and consulted with her, until they got some needlework ready. Of a day, she would cross over to the quarters of dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, and twice pay her salutations, but, she could not help as well amusing them and sitting with them to keep them company. When free, she would come and see her cousins in the garden, and have, at odd times, a chat with them, so having, during daylight no leisure to speak of, she was wont, of a night, to ply her needle by lamplight, and only retire to sleep after the third watch had come and gone.

As for Tai-yü, she had, as a matter of course, a relapse of her complaint regularly every year, soon after the spring equinox and autumn solstice. But she had, during the last autumn, also found her grandmother Chia in such buoyant spirits, that she had walked a little too much on two distinct occasions, and naturally fatigued herself more than was good for her. Recently, too, she had begun to cough and to feel heavier than she had done at ordinary times, so she never by any chance put her foot out of doors, but remained at home and looked after her health. When at times, dullness crept over her, she longed for her cousins to come and chat with her and dispel her despondent feelings. But whenever Pao-ch'ai or any of her cousins paid her a visit, she barely uttered half a dozen, words, before she felt quite averse to any society. Yet one and all made every allowance for her illness. And as she had ever been in poor health and not strong

enough to resist any annoyance, they did not find the least fault with her, despite even any lack of propriety she showed in playing the hostess with them, or any remissness on her part in observing the prescribed rules of etiquette.

Pao-ch'ai came, on this occasion to call on her. The conversation started on the symptoms of her ailment. "The various doctors, who visit this place," Pao-ch'ai consequently remarked, "may, it's true, be all very able practitioners; but you take their medicines and don't reap the least benefit! Wouldn't it be as well therefore to ask some other person of note to come and see you? And could he succeed in getting you all right, wouldn't it be nice? Here you year by year ail away throughout the whole length of spring and summer; but you're neither so old nor so young, so what will be the end of it? Besides, it can't go on for ever."

"It's no use," Tai-yü rejoined. "I know well enough that there's no cure for this complaint of mine! Not to speak of when I'm unwell, why even when I'm not, my state is such that one can see very well that there's no hope!"

Pao-ch'ai shook her head. "Quite so!" she ventured. "An old writer says: 'Those who eat, live.' But what you've all along eaten hasn't been enough to strengthen your energies and physique. This isn't a good thing!"

Tai-yü heaved a sigh. "Whether I'm to live or die is all destiny!" she said. "Riches and honours are in the hands of heaven; and human strength cannot suffice to forcibly get even them! But my complaint this year seems to be far worse than in past years, instead of any better."

While deploring her lot, she coughed two or three times. "It struck me," Pao-ch'ai said, "that in that prescription of yours I saw yesterday there was far too much ginseng and cinnamon. They are splendid tonics, of course, but too many heating things are not good. I think that the first urgent thing to do is to ease the liver and give tone to the stomach. When once the fire in the liver is reduced, it will not be able to overcome the stomach; and, when once the digestive organs are free of ailment, drink and food will be able to give nutriment to the human frame. As soon as you get out of bed, every morning, take one ounce of birds' nests, of superior quality, and five mace of sugar candy and prepare congee with them in a silver kettle. When once you get into the way of taking this decoction, you'll find it far more efficacious than medicines; for it possesses the highest virtue for invigorating the vagina and bracing up the physique."

“You’ve certainly always treated people with extreme consideration,” sighed Tai-yü, “but such a supremely suspicious person am I that I imagined that you inwardly concealed some evil design! Yet ever since the day on which you represented to me how unwholesome it was to read obscene books, and you gave me all that good advice, I’ve felt most grateful to you! I’ve hitherto, in fact, been mistaken in my opinion; and the truth of the matter is that I remained under this misconception up to the very present. But you must carefully consider that when my mother died, I hadn’t even any sisters or brothers; and that up to this my fifteenth year there has never been a single person to admonish me as you did the other day. Little wonder is it if that girl Yün speaks well of you! Whenever, in former days, I heard her heap praise upon you, I felt uneasy in my mind, but, after my experiences of yesterday, I see how right she was. When you, for instance, began to tell me all those things, I didn’t forgive you at the time, but, without worrying yourself in the least about it you went on, contrariwise, to tender me the advice you did. This makes it evident that I have laboured under a mistaken idea! Had I not made this discovery the other day, I wouldn’t be speaking like this to your very face to-day. You told me a few minutes back to take bird’s nest congee; but birds’ nests are, I admit, easily procured; yet all on account of my sickly constitution and of the relapses I have every year of this complaint of mine, which amounts to nothing, doctors have had to be sent for, medicines, with ginseng and cinnamon, have had to be concocted, and I’ve given already such trouble as to turn heaven and earth topsy-turvey; so were I now to start again a new fad, by having some birds’ nests congee or other prepared, our worthy senior, Madame Wang, and lady Feng, will, all three of them, have no objection to raise; but that posse of matrons and maids below will unavoidably despise me for my excessive fussiness! Just notice how every one in here ogles wildly like tigers their prey; and stealthily says one thing and another, simply because they see how fond our worthy ancestor is of both Pao-yü and lady Feng, and how much more won’t they do these things with me? What’s more, I’m not a pucker mistress. I’ve really come here as a mere refugee, for I had no one to sustain me and no one to depend upon. They already bear me considerable dislike; so much so, that I’m still quite at a loss whether I should stay or go; and why should I make them heap execrations upon me?”

“Well, in that case,” Pao-ch’ai observed, “I’m too in the same plight as yourself!”

“How can you compare yourself with me?” Tai-yü exclaimed. “You have a mother; and a brother as well! You’ve also got some business and land in here,

and, at home, you can call houses' and fields your own. It's only therefore the ties of relationship, which make you stay here at all. Neither are you in anything whether large or small, in their debt for one single cash or even half a one; and when you want to go, you're at liberty to go. But I, have nothing whatever that I can call my own. Yet, in what I eat, wear, and use, I am, in every trifle, entirely on the same footing as the young ladies in their household, so how ever can that mean lot not despise me out and out?"

"The only extra expense they'll have to go to by and bye," Pao-ch'ai laughed, "will be to get one more trousseau, that's all. And for the present, it's too soon yet to worry yourself about that!"

At this insinuation, Tai-yü unconsciously blushed scarlet. "One treats you," she smiled, "as a decent sort of person, and confides in you the woes of one's heart, and, instead of sympathising with me, you make me the means of raising a laugh!"

"Albeit I raise a laugh at your expense," Pao-ch'ai rejoined, a smile curling her lips, "what I say is none the less true! But compose your mind! I'll try every day that I'm here to cheer you up; so come to me with every grievance or trouble, for I shall, needless to say, dispel those that are within my power. Notwithstanding that I have a brother, you yourself know well enough what he's like! All I have is a mother, so I'm just a trifle better off than you! We can therefore well look upon ourselves as being in the same boat, and sympathise with each other. You have, besides, plenty of wits about you, so why need you give way to groans, as did Ssu Ma-niu? What you said just now is quite right; but, you should worry and fret about as little and not as much as you can. On my return home, tomorrow, I'll tell my mother; and, as I think there must be still some birds' nests in our house, we'll send you several ounces of them. You can then tell the servant-maids to prepare some for you at whatever time you want every day; and you'll thus be suiting your own convenience and be giving no trouble or annoyance to any one."

"The things are, of themselves, of little account," eagerly responded Tai-yü laughingly. "What's difficult to find is one with as much feeling as yourself."

"What's there in this worth speaking about?" Pao-ch'ai said. "What grieves me

is that I fail to be as nice as I should be with those I come across. But, I presume, you feel quite done up now, so I'll be off!"

"Come in the evening again," Tai-yü pressed her, "and have a chat with me."

While assuring her that she would come, Pao-ch'ai walked out, so let us leave her alone for the present.

Tai-yü, meanwhile, drank a few sips of thin congee, and then once more lay herself down on her bed. But before the sun set, the weather unexpectedly changed, and a fine drizzling rain set in. So gently come the autumn showers that dull and fine are subject to uncertain alternations. The shades of twilight gradually fell on this occasion. The heavens too got so overcast as to look deep black. Besides the effect of this change on her mind, the patter of the rain on the bamboo tops intensified her despondency, and, concluding that Pao-ch'ai would be deterred from coming, she took up, in the lamp light, the first book within her reach, which turned out to be the 'Treasury of Miscellaneous Lyrics.' Finding among these 'the Pinings of a maiden in autumn,' 'the Anguish of Separation,' and other similar poems, Tai-yü felt unawares much affected; and, unable to restrain herself from giving vent to her feelings in writing, she, there and then, improvised the following stanza, in the same strain as the one on separation; complying with the rules observed in the 'Spring River-Flower' and 'Moonlight Night.' These verses, she then entitled 'the Poem on the Autumn evening, when wind and rain raged outside the window.' Their burden was:

In autumn, flowers decay; herbage, when autumn comes, doth yellow turn. On long autumnal nights, the autumn lanterns with bright radiance burn. As from my window autumn scenes I scan, autumn endless doth seem. This mood how can I bear, when wind and rain despondency enhance? How sudden break forth wind and rain, and help to make the autumntide! Fright snaps my autumn dreams, those dreams which under my lattice I dreamt. A sad autumnal gloom enclasps my heart, and drives all sleep away! In person I approach the autumn screen to snuff the weeping wick. The tearful candles with a flickering flame consume on their short stands. They stir up grief, dazzle my eyes, and a sense of parting arouse. In what family's courts do not the blasts of autumn winds intrude? And where in autumn does not rain patter against the window-frames? The silken quilt cannot ward off the nipping force of autumn winds. The drip of the half drained water-clock impels the autumn rains. A lull for few nights reigned, but the wind has again risen in strength. By the lantern I weep, as if I sat

with some one who must go. The small courtyard, full of bleak mist, is now become quite desolate. With quick drip drops the rain on the distant bamboos and vacant sills. What time, I wonder, will the wind and rain their howl and patter cease? The tears already I have shed have soakèd through the window gauze.

After scanning her verses, she flung the pen aside, and was just on the point of retiring to rest, when a waiting-maid announced that ‘master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, had come.’ Barely was the announcement out of her lips, than Pao-yü appeared on the scene with a large bamboo hat on his head, and a wrapper thrown over his shoulders. Of a sudden, a smile betrayed itself on Tai-yü‘s lips. “Where does this fisherman come from?” she exclaimed.

“Are you better to-day?” Pao-yü inquired with alacrity. “Have you had any medicines? How much rice have you had to eat to-day?”

While plying her with questions, he took off the hat and divested himself of the wrapper; and, promptly raising the lamp with one hand, he screened it with the other and threw its rays upon Tai-yü‘s face. Then straining his eyes, he scrutinised her for a while. “You look better to-day,” he smiled.

As soon as he threw off his wrapper, Tai-yü noticed that he was clad in a short red silk jacket, the worse for wear; that he was girded with a green sash, and that, about his knees, his nether garments were visible, made of green thin silk, brocaded with flowers. Below these, he wore embroidered gauze socks, worked all over with twisted gold thread, and a pair of shoes ornamented with butterflies and clusters of fallen flowers.

“Above, you fight shy of the rain,” Tai-yü remarked, “but aren’t these shoes and socks below afraid of rain? Yet they’re quite clean!”

“This suit is complete!” Pao-yü smiled. “I’ve got a pair of crab-wood clogs, I put on to come over; but I took them off under the eaves of the verandah.”

Tai-yü‘s attention was then attracted by the extreme fineness and lightness of the texture of his wrapper and hat, which were unlike those sold in the market places. “With what grass are they plaited?” she consequently asked. “It would be strange if you didn’t, with this sort of things on, look like a very hedgehog!”

“These three articles are a gift from the Prince of Pei Ching,” Pao-yü answered.

“Ordinarily, when it rains, he too wears this kind of outfit at home. But if it has taken your fancy, I’ll have a suit made for you. There’s nothing peculiar about the other things, but this hat is funny! The crown at the top is movable; so if you want to wear a hat, during snowy weather in wintertime, you pull off the bamboo pegs, and remove the crown, and there you only have the circular brim. This is worn, when it snows, by men and women alike. I’ll give you one therefore to wear in the wintry snowy months.”

“I don’t want it!” laughed Tai-yü. “Were I to wear this sort of thing, I’d look like one of those fisherwomen, one sees depicted in pictures or represented on the stage!”

Upon reaching this point, she remembered that there was some connection between her present remarks and the comparison she had some time back made with regard to Pao-yü, and, before she had time to indulge in regrets, a sense of shame so intense overpowered her that the colour rushed to her face, and, leaning her head on the table, she coughed and coughed till she could not stop. Pao-yü, however, did not detect her embarrassment; but catching sight of some verses lying on the table, he eagerly snatched them up and conned them from beginning to end. “Splendid!” he could not help crying. But the moment Tai-yü heard his exclamation, she speedily jumped to her feet, and clutched the verses and burnt them over the lamp.

“I’ve already committed them sufficiently to memory!” Pao-yü laughed.

“I want to have a little rest,” Tai-yü said, “so please get away; come back again tomorrow.”

At these words, Pao-yü drew back his hand, and producing from his breast a gold watch about the size of a walnut, he looked at the time. The hand pointed between eight and nine p.m.; so hastily putting it away, “You should certainly retire to rest!” he replied. “My visit has upset you. I’ve quite tired you out this long while.” With these apologies, he threw the wrapper over him, put on the rain-hat and quitted the room. But turning round, he retraced his steps inside. “Is there anything you fancy to eat?” he asked. “If there be, tell me, and I’ll let our venerable ancestor know of it tomorrow as soon as it’s day. Won’t I explain things clearer than any of the old matrons could?”

“Let me,” rejoined Tai-yü smiling, “think in the night. I’ll let you know early

tomorrow. But harken, it's raining harder than it did; so be off at once! Have you got any attendants, or no?"

"Yes!" interposed the two matrons. "There are servants to wait on him. They're outside holding his umbrella and lighting the lanterns."

"Are they lighting lanterns with this weather?" laughed Tai-yü.

"It won't hurt them!" Pao-yü answered. "They're made of sheep's horn, so they don't mind the rain."

Hearing this, Tai-yü put back her hand, and, taking down an ornamented glass lantern in the shape of a ball from the book case, she asked the servants to light a small candle and bring it to her; after which, she handed the lantern to Pao-yü. "This," she said, "gives out more light than the others; and is just the thing for rainy weather."

"I've also got one like it." Pao-yü replied. "But fearing lest they might slip, fall down and break it, I did not have it lighted and brought round."

"What's of more account," Tai-yü inquired, "harm to a lantern or to a human being? You're not besides accustomed to wearing clogs, so tell them to walk ahead with those lanterns. This one is as light and handy as it is light-giving; and is really adapted for rainy weather, so wouldn't it be well if you carried it yourself? You can send it over to me tomorrow! But, were it even to slip from your hand, it wouldn't matter much. How is it that you've also suddenly developed this money-grabbing sort of temperament? It's as bad as if you ripped your intestines to secrete pearls in."

After these words, Pao-yü approached her and took the lantern from her. Ahead then advanced two matrons, with umbrellas and sheep horn lanterns, and behind followed a couple of waiting-maids also with umbrellas. Pao-yü handed the glass lantern to a young maid to carry, and, supporting himself on her shoulder, he straightway wended his steps on his way back.

But presently arrived an old servant from the Heng Wu court, provided as well with an umbrella and a lantern, to bring over a large bundle of birds' nests, and a packet of foreign sugar, pure as powder, and white as petals of plum-blossom and flakes of snow. "These," she said, "are much better than what you can buy. Our young lady sends you word, miss, to first go on with these. When you've

done with them, she'll let you have some more."

"Many thanks for the trouble you've taken!" Tai-yü returned for answer; and then asked her to go and sit outside and have a cup of tea.

"I won't have any tea," the old servant smiled. "I've got something else to attend to."

"I'm well aware that you've all got plenty in hand," Tai-yü resumed with a smiling countenance. "But the weather being cool now and the nights long, it's more expedient than ever to establish two things: a night club and a gambling place."

"I won't disguise the fact from you, miss," the old servant laughingly observed, "that I've managed this year to win plenty of money. Several servants have, under any circumstances, to do night duty; and, as any neglect in keeping watch wouldn't be the right thing, isn't it as well to have a night club, as one can sit on the lookout and dispel dullness as well? But it's again my turn to play the croupier to-day, so I must be getting along to the place, as the garden gate, will, by this time, be nearly closing!"

This rejoinder evoked a laugh from Tai-yü. "I've given you all this bother," she remarked, "and made you lose your chances of getting money, just to bring these things in the rain." And calling a servant she bade her present her with several hundreds of cash to buy some wine with, to drive the damp away.

"I've uselessly put you again, miss, to the expense of giving me a tip for wine," the old servant smiled. But saying this she knocked her forehead before her; and issuing outside, she received the money, after which, she opened her umbrella, and trudged back.

Tzu Chüan meanwhile put the birds' nests away; and removing afterwards the lamps, she lowered the portières and waited upon Tai-yü until she lay herself down to sleep.

While she reclined all alone on her pillow, Tai-yü thought gratefully of Pao-ch'ai. At one moment, she envied her for having a mother and a brother; and at another, she mused that with the friendliness Pao-yü had ever shown her they were bound to be the victims of suspicion. But the pitter-patter of the rain, dripping on the bamboo tops and banana leaves, fell on her ear; and, as a fresh

coolness penetrated the curtain, tears once more unconsciously trickled down her cheeks. In this frame of mind, she continued straight up to the fourth watch, when she at last gradually dropped into a sound sleep.

For the time, however, there is nothing that we can add. So should you, reader, desire to know any subsequent details, peruse what is written in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLVI.

An improper man with difficulty keeps from improprieties. The maid, Yüan Yang, vows to break off the marriage match.

Lin Tai-yü, to resume our story, dropped off gradually to sleep about the close of the fourth watch. As there is therefore nothing more that we can for the present say about her, let us take up the thread of our narrative with lady Feng.

Upon hearing that Madame Hsing wanted to see her, she could not make out what it could be about, so hurriedly putting on some extra things on her person and head, she got into a carriage and crossed over.

Madame Hsing at once dismissed every attendant from her suite of apartments. “I sent for you,” she began, addressing herself to lady Feng, in a confidential tone, “not for anything else, but on account of something which places me on the horns of a dilemma. My husband has entrusted me with a job; and being quite at my wits’ ends how to act, I’d like first to consult with you. My husband has taken quite a fancy to Yüan Yang, who is in our worthy senior’s rooms; so much so, that he’s desirous to get her into his quarters as a secondary wife. He has deputed me therefore to ask her of our venerable ancestor. I know that this is quite an ordinary matter. Yet I can’t help fearing that our worthy senior may refuse to give her. But do you perchance see your way to bring this concern about?”

Lady Feng listened to her. “You shouldn’t, I say, go and bang your head against a nail!” she then vehemently exclaimed. “Were our old ancestor separated from Yüan Yang, she wouldn’t even touch her rice! How ever could she reconcile herself to part from her? Besides, our worthy senior has time and again said, in

the course of a chat, ‘that she can’t see the earthly use of a man well up in years, as your lord and master is, having here one concubine, and there another? That cooping them up in his rooms, is a mere waste of human beings. That he neglects his constitution and doesn’t husband it; and that he doesn’t either attend diligently to his official duties, but spends his whole days in boozing with his young concubines. When your ladyship hears these nice doings of his, don’t you feel enamoured with that fine gentleman of ours? Were he even to try, at this juncture, to beat a retreat, he couldn’t, I fear, effectively do so. Yet, instead of (making an effort to turn tail), he wants to go and dig the tiger’s nostrils with a blade of straw. Don’t, my lady, be angry with me; but I daren’t undertake the errand. It’s clear as day that it will be a wild goose chase. What’s more, it will do him no good; but will, contrariwise, heap disgrace upon his own head! Our Mr. Chia She is now so stricken in years, that in all his actions he unavoidably behaves somewhat as a dotard. It would be well therefore for your ladyship to advise him what to do. It isn’t as if he were in the prime of life to be able to do all these things with impunity! He’s got at present a whole array of brothers, nieces, sons, and grandsons; and should he still go on in this wild sort of way, how will he be able to face any of them?”

Madame Hsing gave a sardonic smile. “There are endless wealthy families with three and four concubines,” she said, “and is it in ours that such a thing won’t do? But were I even to tender him as much advice as I can, it isn’t at all likely that he’ll abide by it! Even though that maid be one beloved by our venerable senior, it doesn’t follow that she’ll very well be able to give a rebuff to a hoary-bearded elderly son, and, erewhile, an official, were he to express a wish to have her as an inmate of his household! I sent for you for no other purpose than to deliberate with you, and here you take the initiative and enumerate a whole array of shortcomings. But is there any reason why I should commission you to go? Of course I’ll go and speak to her! You make a bold statement that I don’t give him any good counsel; but don’t you yet know that with a disposition, such as his, he rushes, before I can very well open my lips to advise him, into a tantrum with me?”

Lady Feng was well alive to the fact that Madame Hsing was, by nature, simple and weak-minded, and that all she knew was to adulate Chia She so as to ensure her own safety. That she was, in the next place, ever ready, so greedy was she, to grasp as much hard cash and as many effects, as she could lay hold of, for her own private gain. That she left all family matters, irrespective of important or unimportant, under the sole control of Chia She; but that, whenever anything

turned up, involving any receipts or payments, she extorted an unusual percentage, the moment the money passed through her clutches, giving out as a pretence: ‘Well Chia She is so extravagant that I have to interfere and effect sufficient economies to enable us to make up our deficits.’ And that she would not trust any one, whether son, daughter or servant, nor lend an ear to a single word of remonstrance. When she therefore now heard Madame Hsing speak as she did, she concluded that she must be in another of her perverse moods, and that any admonitions would be of no avail. So hastily forcing a smile: “My lady,” she observed, “you’re perfectly right in your remarks! But how long can I have lived, and what discrimination can I boast of? It seems to me that if a father and mother do not bestow, not a mere servant-girl like she is, but a living jewel of the size of her, on one like Mr. Chia She, to whom are they likely to give her? How can one give faith to words spoken behind one’s back? So what a fool I was (in cramming what I heard down my throat)! Just take our Mr. Secundus, (my husband), as an instance. If ever he does anything to incur blame, Mr. Chia She and you, my lady, feel so wrath with him as to only wish you could lay hands upon him there and then and give him such a blow as would kill him downright, but the moment you set eyes on his face, your whole resentment vanishes, and lo, you again let him have, as of old, everything, and anything, much though both of you might relish it in your hearts! Our worthy ancestor will certainly therefore behave in the present instance, with equal liberality, towards Mr. Chia She! So if her ladyship feels in the humour to-day, she’ll let him have her, I fancy, at once this very day, if he makes the proper advances. But I’ll go ahead and coax our venerable senior; and, when your ladyship comes over, I’ll find some pretence to get out of the way, and take along with me those too who may be present in her rooms, so as to make it convenient for you to broach the subject. If she gives her, so much the better. But if even she doesn’t, it won’t matter; for none of the inmates will have any idea what the object of your mission could have been.”

After listening to her suggestion, Madame Hsing began again to feel in a happier frame of mind. “My idea is,” she observed, “that I shouldn’t start by mentioning anything to our venerable senior, for were she to say that she wouldn’t give her, the matter would be simply quashed on the head. I can’t help thinking that I should first and foremost quietly approach Yüan Yang on the subject. She will, of course, feel extremely ashamed, but when I explain everything minutely to her, she’ll certainly have nothing to say against the proposal, and everything will be all right. I can then speak to our old senior; and, despite any desire on her part not to accede to our wishes, she won’t be able to put the girl off, provided she

herself be willing; for as the adage says: ‘If a person wishes to go, it’s no use trying to keep him.’ Thus needless to say, the whole thing will be satisfactorily settled!”

“You’re really shrewd in your devices, my lady!” lady Feng smilingly ejaculated. “This is perfect in every respect! For without taking Yüan Yang into account, what girl does not long to rise high, or hope to exalt herself, or think of pushing herself forward above the rest as to cast away the chances of becoming half a mistress, and prefer instead being a maid, and merely becoming by and bye the mate of some servant-lad?”

“Quite so!” Madame Hsing smiled. “But let’s put Yüan Yang aside. Who is there, even among the various elderly waiting-maids, who look after the house, who wouldn’t be only too willing to step into these shoes? You’d better then go ahead. But, mind, don’t let the cat out of the bag! I’ll join you as soon as I can finish my evening meal.”

“Yüan Yang,” thereupon secretly reflected lady Feng, “has always been an extremely shrewd-minded girl; to such a degree, that there is notwithstanding all our arguments, no saying positively whether she’ll accept or refuse. So were I to go ahead, and Madame Hsing to follow me by and bye, there won’t be any occasion for her to grumble or complain, so long as she assents; but, if she doesn’t, why, Madame Hsing, who is so suspicious a creature, will possibly imagine that I’ve been gassing with her, and been the means of making her put on side and assume high airs. When Madame Hsing finds then that my conjectures have turned out true again, her shame will be converted into anger, and she’ll so vent her spite upon me that I shall, after all, be put in a false position. Would it not be better then that she and I should go together; for, if she says ‘yes,’ I’ll be all right; and, if she replies ‘no,’ I’ll be on the safe side; and no suspicion, of any kind, will fall upon me!”

At the close of her reflections, “As I was about to cross over here,” she remarked laughingly, “our aunt yonder sent us two baskets of quails, and I gave orders that they should be fried, with the idea that they should be brought to your ladyship, in time for you to have some at your evening repast. Just as I was stepping inside the main entrance, I saw the servant-boys carrying your curricle; they said that it was your ladyship’s vehicle, that it had cracked, and that they were taking it to be repaired. Wouldn’t it be as well then that you should now come in my carriage, for it will be better for you and me to get there together?”

At this suggestion, Madame Hsing directed her servants to come and change her costume. Lady Feng quickly waited upon her, and in a while the two ladies got into one and the same curricle and drove over.

“My lady,” lady Feng went on to say, “it would be well for you to look up our worthy senior, for were I to accompany you, and her ladyship to ask me what was the object of my visit, it would be rather awkward. The best way is for your ladyship to go first, and I’ll join you, as soon as I divest myself of my fine clothes.”

Madame Hsing noticed how reasonable her proposal was, and she readily betook herself to old lady Chia’s quarters. But after a chat with her senior, she quitted the apartment, under the pretence that she was going to Madame Wang’s rooms. Then making her exit by the back door, she passed in front of Yüan Yang’s bedroom. Here she saw Yüan Yang sitting, hard at work at some needlework. The moment she caught sight of Madame Hsing, she rose to her feet.

“What are you up to?” Madame Hsing laughingly inquired. “Let me see! How much nicer you embroider artificial flowers now!”

So speaking, she entered, and, taking the needlework from her hands, she scrutinised it, while extolling its beauty. Then laying down the work, and scanning her again from head to foot, she observed that her costume consisted of a half-new, grey thin silk jacket, and a bluish satin waistcoat with scollops; that below this came a water-green jupe; that her waist was slim as that of a wasp; that her shoulders sloped as if pared; that her face resembled a duck’s egg; that her hair was black and shiny; that her nose was very high, and that on both her cheeks were slightly visible several small flat moles.

Yüan Yang realised how intently she was being passed under scrutiny, and began to feel inwardly uneasy; while utter astonishment prevailed in her mind. “Madame,” she felt impelled to ask, “what do you come for at this impossible hour?”

At a wink from Madame Hsing, her attendants withdrew from the room. Madame Hsing forthwith seated herself, and grasped Yüan Yang’s hand in hers. “I’ve come,” she smiled, “with the special purpose of presenting you my congratulations.”

This reply enabled Yüan Yang at once to form within herself some surmise more

or less correct of the object of her errand, and suddenly blushing crimson, she lowered her head, and uttered not a word.

“You know well enough,” she next heard Madame Hsing resume, “that there’s not a single reliable person with my husband; but much though we’d like to purchase some other girl we fear that such as might come out of a broker’s household wouldn’t be quite spotless and taintless. Nor would one be able to get any idea what her failings are, until after she has been purchased and brought home; when she too will be sure, in two or three days, to behave like an imp and play some monkey tricks! That’s why we thought of choosing some home-born girl out of those which throng in our mansion, but then again we could find none decent enough; for if her looks were not at fault, her disposition was not proper; and if she possessed this quality, she lacked that one. Hence it is that after repeatedly choosing with dispassionate eye, during half a year, (he finds) that there’s only you among that whole bevy of girls, who’s worth anything; that in looks, behaviour and deportment, you’re gentle, trustworthy, and perfection itself in every respect. His intention therefore is to ask your hand of our old lady and take you over and attach you to his quarters. You won’t be treated as one newly-purchased, or newly-sought for outside; for the moment you put your foot into our house, you’ll at once have your face shaved and be promoted to a secondary wife; so you’ll thus attain as much dignity as honour. More, you’re one who is anxious to excel; and, as the proverb says, ‘gold will still be exchanged for gold.’ My husband has, who’d have thought it, taken a fancy to you, so when you now enter our threshold, you’ll fulfil the wish you’ve cherished all along with such high purpose and lofty aim, and stop the mouths of those persons, who are envious of your lot. Follow me therefore and let’s go and lay the matter before our venerable ancestor.”

Arguing the while, she dragged her by the hand with the idea of hurrying her off there and then. Yüan Yang, however, blushed to her very ears, and, snatching her hand out of her grip she refused to budge.

Madame Hsing was conscious that she was under the spell of intense shame. “What’s there in this to be ashamed?” she continued, “You needn’t besides breathe a word! All you have to do is to follow me, that’s all.”

Yüan Yang continued to droop her head and to decline to go with her. Madame Hsing, perceiving her behaviour, went on to exhort her. “Is it likely, pray,” she said, “that you still hesitate? If you actually don’t feel inclined to accept the offer, you’re, in real truth, a foolish girl; for here you let go the chances of becoming the secondary consort of a master, and choose instead to continue a servant-girl. You’ll be united, in two or three years, to no one higher than some young domestic, and remain as much a bond-servant as ever! If you come along with us, you know that my disposition too is gentle; that I’m not one of those persons, who don’t show any regard for any one; that my husband will also treat you as well as he does every one else, and that when, in the course of a year or so, you give birth to a son or daughter, you’ll be placed on the same footing as myself. And of all the servants at home, will any you may wish to employ not deign to move to execute your orders? If now that you have a chance of becoming a mistress, you don’t choose to, why, you’ll miss the opportunity, and then you may repent it, but it will be too late!”

Yüan Yang still kept her head bent against her chest and spake not a syllable by way of reply.

“How is it,” added Madame Hsing, “that you, who’ve ever been so quick have now too begun to be so infirm of purpose? What is there that doesn’t fall in with your wishes? Just tell me; and I can safely assure you that you’ll have everything done to satisfy you.”

Yüan Yang observed, as hitherto, perfect silence.

“I suppose,” laughed Madame Hsing, “that having a father and mother, you yourself don’t wish to speak, for fear of being put to the blush, and that you want to wait until such time as they consult you about it, eh? This is quite right! But you’d better let me go and make the proposal to them and tell them to come and ascertain your wishes; and whatever your answer then may be just entrust it to them.”

This said, she sped into lady Feng’s suite of rooms.

Lady Feng had long ago changed her attire, and availed herself of the absence of any bystander in her apartments to confide the whole matter to P'ing Erh.

P'ing Erh nodded her head and smiled. "According to my views, success is not so certain," she observed. "She and I have often secretly talked this matter over, and the arguments I heard her propound don't make it the least probable that she'll consent. But all we can say now is: 'We'll see!'"

"Madame Hsing," lady Feng remarked, "is sure to come over here to consult with me. If she has assented, well and good; but, if she hasn't, she'll bring displeasure upon her own self, and won't she feel out of countenance, if all of you are present? So tell the others to fry several quails, and get anything nice, that goes well with them, and prepare it for our repast, while you can go and stroll about in some other spot, and return when you fancy she has gone."

Hearing this, P'ing Erh transmitted her wishes word for word to the matrons; after which, she sauntered leisurely all alone, into the garden.

When Yüan Yang saw Madame Hsing depart, she concluded that she was bound to go into lady Feng's rooms to consult with her, and that some one was sure to come and ask her about the proposal, so thinking it advisable to cross over to this side of the mansion to get out of the way, she consequently repaired in quest of Hu Po.

"Should our old mistress," she said to her, "ask for me, just say that I was so unwell that I couldn't even have any breakfast; that I've gone into the garden for a stroll, but that I will be back at once."

Hu Po undertook to tell her so, and Yüan Yang then betook herself too into the garden. While lolling all over the place, she, contrary to her expectations, encountered P'ing Erh. P'ing Erh looked round to see that there was no one about. "Here comes the new secondary wife!" she smilingly exclaimed.

Yüan Yang caught this greeting, and promptly the colour rose to her face. "How strange it is," she rejoined, "that you've all colluded together to come, with one accord, and scheme against me! But wait until I've had it out with your mistress, and then I'll set things all right."

When P'ing Erh observed the angry look on Yüan Yang's countenance, her conscience was so stricken with remorse, on account of the inconsiderate remark

she had passed, that drawing her under the maple tree, she made her sit on the same boulder as herself, and then went so far as to recount to her, from beginning to end, all that transpired, and everything that was said on lady Feng's return, a short while back, from the off mansion.

Blushes flew to Yüan Yang's cheeks. Facing P'ing Erh, she gave a sardonic smile. "We've all ever been friends," she said, "that is: Hsi Jen, Hu Po, Su Yün, Tzu Chüan, Ts'ai Hsia, Yü Ch'uan, She Yüeh, Ts'ui Mo, Ts'ui Lü, who was in Miss Shih's service and is now gone, K'o Jen and Chin Ch'uan, now deceased, Hsi Hsüeh, who left, and you and I. Ever since our youth up, how many chats have the ten or dozen of us not had, and what have we not been up to together? But now that we've grown up, each of us has gone her own way! Yet, my heart is just what it was in days gone by. Whenever there's anything for me to say or do, I don't try to impose upon any of you; so just first treasure in your heart the secret I'm going to tell you, and don't mention it to our lady Secunda! Not to speak of our senior master wishing to make me his concubine, were even our lady to die this very moment, and he to send endless go-betweens, and countless betrothal presents, with the idea of wedding me and taking me over as his lawful primary wife, I wouldn't also go."

P'ing Erh was at this point desirous to put in some observation, when from behind the boulder became audible the loud tones of laughter. "You most barefaced girl!" a voice cried. "It's well you're not afraid of your teeth falling when you utter such things!"

These words reached the ears of both girls, and, so unawares were they taken, that they got a regular start, and jumping up with all haste they went to see behind the boulder. They found no one else than Hsi Jen, who presented herself before them, with a smiling countenance, and asked: "What's up? Do tell me!"

As she spoke, the trio seated themselves on a rock. P'ing Erh then imparted to Hsi Jen as well the drift of their recent conversation.

"Properly speaking, we shouldn't pass such judgments," Hsi Jen remarked, after listening to her confidences, "but this senior master of ours is really a most licentious libertine. So much so, that whenever he comes across a girl with any good looks about her, he won't let her out of his grasp."

"Since you don't like to entertain his offer," P'ing Erh suggested, "I'll put you

up to a plan."

"What plan is it?" Yüan Yang inquired.

"Just simply tell our old mistress," P'ing Erh laughed, "this answer: that you've already been promised to our master Secundus, Mr. Lien. Our senior master then won't very well be able to be importunate.'"

"Ts'ui!" ejaculated Yüan Yang. "What a thing you are! Do you still make such suggestions? Didn't your mistress the other day utter this silly nonsense! Who'd have thought it, her words have now come true!"

"If you won't have either of them," Hsi Jen smiled, "my idea is that you should tell our old lady point blank and ask her to give out that she promised you long ago to our master, number two, Pao-yü. Our senior master will then banish this fad from his mind."

Yüan Yang was overcome with anger, shame and exasperation. "What dreadful vixens both of you are!" she shouted. "You don't deserve a natural death! I find myself in a fix, and treat you as decent sort of persons and confide in you so that you should arrange matters for me; and not to say that you don't bother yourselves a rap about me, you take turn and turn about to poke fun at me! You're under the impression, in your own minds, that your fates are sealed, and that both of you are bound by and bye to become secondary wives; but I can't help thinking that affairs under the heavens don't so certainly fall in always with one's wishes and expectations! So you'd better now pull up a bit, and not be cheeky to such an excessive degree!"

Both her companions then realised in what state of despair she was, and promptly forcing a smile, "Dear sister," they said, "don't be so touchy! We've been, ever since we were little mites, like very sisters! All we've done is to spontaneously indulge in a little fun in a spot where there's no one present. But tell us what you've decided to do, so that we too should know, and set our minds at ease."

"Decided what?" Yüan Yang cried. "All I know is that I won't go; that's finished."

P'ing Erh shook her head. "You mightn't go," she interposed, "but it isn't likely that the matter will drop. You're well aware what sort of temperament that of our

senior master's is. It's true that you're attached to our old mistress' rooms, and that he can't, just at present, presume to do the least thing to you; but can it be, forsooth, that you'll be with the old dame for your whole lifetime? You'll also have to leave to get married, and if you then fall into his hands, it won't go well with you."

Yüan Yang smiled ironically. "I won't leave this place so long as my old lady lives!" Yüan Yang protested. "In the event of her ladyship departing this life, he'll have, under any circumstances, to also go into mourning for three years; for there's no such thing as starting by marrying a concubine, soon after a mother's death! And while he waits for three years to expire, can one say what may not happen? It will be time enough to talk about it when that date comes. But should I be driven to despair from being hard pressed, I'll cut my hair off and become a nun. If not, there's yet another thing: death! And as for a whole life time I shall not join myself to a man, what joy will not then be mine, for having managed to preserve my purity?"

"In very truth," P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen laughed, "this vixen has no sense of shame! She has now more than ever spoken whatever came foremost to her lips!"

"What matters a moment's shame," Yüan Yang rejoined, "when things have reached this juncture? But if you don't believe my words, well, you'll be able to see by and bye; then you'll feel convinced. Madame Hsing said a short while back that she was going to look up my father and mother, but I'd like to see whether she'll proceed to Nanking to find them."

"Your parents are in Nanking looking after the houses," P'ing Erh said, "and they can't come up; yet, in the long run, they can be found out. Your elder brother and your sister-in-law are besides in here at present. You, poor thing, are a child born in this establishment. You're not like us two, who are solitary creatures here."

"What does it matter whether I be born here or not?" Yüan Yang exclaimed. "'You can lead a horse to a fountain, but you can't make him drink!' So if I don't listen to any proposals, is it likely, may I ask, that they'll kill my father and mother?" While the words were still on her lips, they caught sight of her sister-in-law, advancing from the opposite side. "As they couldn't at once get at your parents," Hsi Jen remarked, "they've, for a certainty, told your sister-in-law."

“All this wench is good for,” Yüan Yang shouted, “is ‘to rush about as if selling camels in the six states!’ If she heard what I said, she won’t feel flattered.”

But while she spoke, her sister-in-law approached them. “Where didn’t I look for you?” her sister-in-law smilingly observed. “Have you, miss, run over here? Come along with me; I’ve got something to tell you!”

P’ing Erh and Hsi Jen speedily motioned to her to sit down, but (Yüan Yang’s) sister-in-law demurred. “Young ladies, pray be seated; I’ve come in search of our girl to tell her something.”

Hsi Jen and P’ing Erh feigned perfect ignorance. “What can it be that it’s so pressing?” they said with a smile. “We were engaged in guessing puns here, so let’s find out this, before you go.”

“What do you want to tell me?” Yuan Yang inquired. “Speak out!”

“Follow me!” her sister-in-law laughed. “When we get over there, I’ll tell you. It’s really some good tidings!”

“Is it perchance what Madame Hsing has told you?” Yüan Yang asked.

“Since you, miss, know what it’s all about,” her sister-in-law added smilingly, “what else remains for me to do? Be quick and come with me and I’ll explain everything. Verily, it’s a piece of happiness as large as the heavens!”

Yüan Yang, at these words, rose to her feet and spat contemptuously with all her might in her sister-in-law’s face. Pointing at her: “Be quick,” she cried abusively, “and stop that filthy tongue of yours! It would be ever so much better, were you to bundle yourself away from this! What good tidings and what piece of happiness! Little wonder is it that you long and crave the whole day long to see other people’s daughter turned into a secondary wife as one and all of your family would rely upon her to act contrary to reason and right! A whole household has been converted into secondary wives! But the sight fills you with such keen jealousy that you would like to also lay hold of me and throw me into the pit-fire! If any honours fall to my share, all of you outside will do everything disorderly and improper, and raise yourselves, in your own estimations, to the status of uncles (and aunts). But if I don’t get any, and come to grief, you’ll draw in your foul necks, and let me live or die as I please!”

While indulging in this raillery, she gave vent to tears. P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen did all they could to reason with her so as to prevent her from crying.

Her sister-in-law felt quite out of countenance. "Whether you mean to accept the proposal, or not," she consequently said, "you can anyhow speak nicely. It isn't worth the while dragging this one in and involving that one! The proverb adequately says: 'In the presence of a dwarf one mustn't speak of dwarfish things!' Here you've been heaping insult upon me, but I didn't presume to retaliate. These two young ladies have however given you no provocation whatever; and yet by referring, as you've done, in this way and that way to secondary wives how can people stand it peacefully?"

"You shouldn't speak so!" Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh quickly remonstrated. "She didn't allude to us; so don't be implicating others! Have you heard of any ladies or gentlemen who'd like to raise us to the rank of secondary wives? What's more, we two have neither father nor mother, nor brothers, within these doors, to avail themselves of our positions to act in a way contrary to right and reason! If she abuses people, let her do so; it isn't worth our while to be touchy!"

"Seeing," Yüan Yang resumed, "that the abuse I've heaped upon her head has put her to such shame that she doesn't know where to go and screen her face, she tries to egg you two on! But you two have, fortunately, your wits about you! Though quite impatient, I never started arguing the question; she it was who chose to speak just now."

Her sister-in-law felt inwardly much disconcerted, and beat a retreat in high dudgeon. But Yüan Yang so lost her temper that she still went on to abuse her; and it was only after P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen had admonished her for ever so long that she let the matter drop.

"What were you hiding there for?" P'ing Erh then asked Hsi Jen. "We couldn't see anything of you."

"I went," Hsi Jen explained, "into Miss Quarta's rooms to see our Mr. Pao-yü, but, who'd have thought it, I got there a little too late, and they told me that he had gone home. But my suspicions were, however, aroused as I couldn't make out how it was that I hadn't come across him, and I was about to go and hunt him up in Miss Lin's apartments, when I met one of her servants who said that he hadn't been there either. Then just as I was surmising that he must have gone

out of the garden, behold, you came, as luck would have it, from the opposite direction. But I dodged you, so you didn't see anything of me. Subsequently, she too appeared on the scene; but I got behind the boulder, from the back of these trees. I, however, saw that you two had come to have a chat. Strange to say, though you have four eyes between you, you never caught a glimpse of me."

Scarcely had she concluded this remark, than they heard some one else from behind, laughingly exclaim, "Four eyes never saw you, but your six eyes haven't as yet found me out!"

The three girls received quite a shock from fright; but turning round, they perceived that it was no other person than Pao-yü.

Hsi Jen smiled, and was the first to speak. "You've made me have a good search," she said. "Where do you hail from?"

"I was just leaving cousin Quarta's," Pao-yü laughed, "when I noticed you coming along, just in front of me; and knowing well enough that you were bent upon finding me, I concealed myself to have a lark with you. I saw you then go by, with uplifted head, enter the court, walk out again, and ask every one you met on your way; but there I stood convulsed with laughter. I was only waiting to rush up to you and frighten you, when I afterwards realised that you too were prowling stealthily about, so I readily inferred that you also were playing a trick upon some one. Then when I put out my head and looked before me, I saw that it was these two girls, so I came behind you, by a circuitous way; and as soon as you left, I forthwith sneaked into your hiding place."

"Let's go and look behind there," P'ing Erh suggested laughingly; "we may possibly discover another couple; there's no saying."

"There's no one else!" Pao-yü laughed.

Yüan Yang had long ago concluded that every word of their conversation had been overheard by Pao-yü; but leaning against the rock, she pretended to be fast asleep.

Pao-yü gave her a push. "This stone is cold!" he smiled. "Let's go and sleep in our rooms. Won't it be better there?"

Saying this, he made an attempt to pull Yüan Yang to her feet. Then hastily

pressing P’ing Erh to repair to his quarters and have some tea, he united his efforts with those of Hsi Jen, and tried to induce Yüan Yang to come away. Yüan Yang, at length, got up, and the quartet betook themselves, after all, into the I Hung court.

Pao-yü had caught every word that had fallen from their lips a few minutes back, and felt, indeed, at heart so much distressed on Yüan Yang’s behalf, that throwing himself silently on his bed, he left the three girls in the outer rooms to prosecute their chat and laugh.

On the other side of the compound, Madame Hsing about this time inquired of lady Feng who Yüan Yang’s father was.

“Her father,” lady Feng replied, “is called Chin Ts’ai. He and his wife are in Nanking; they have to look after our houses there, so they can’t pay frequent visits to the capital. Her brother is the Wen-hsiang, who acts at present as our senior’s accountant; but her sister-in-law too is employed in our worthy ancestor’s yonder as head washerwoman.”

Madame Hsing thereupon despatched a servant to go and call Yüan Yang’s sister-in-law. On Mrs. Chin Wen-hsiang’s arrival, she told her all. Mrs. Chin was naturally pleased and left in capital spirits to find Yüan Yang, in the hope that the moment she communicated the offer to her, the whole thing would be satisfactorily arranged. But contrary to all her anticipations, she had to bear a good blowing up from Yüan Yang, and to be told several unpleasant things by Hsi Jen and P’ing Erh, so that she was filled with as much shame as indignation. She then came and reported the result to Madame Hsing. “It’s no use,” she said, “she gave me a scolding.” But as lady Feng was standing by, she could not summon up courage enough to allude to P’ing Erh, so she added: “Hsi Jen too helped her to rate me, and they told me a whole lot of improper words, which could not be breathed in a mistress’ ears. It would thus be better to arrange with our master to purchase a girl and have done; for from all I see, neither can that mean vixen enjoy such great good fortune, nor we such vast propitious luck!”

“What’s that again to do with Hsi Jen? How came they to know anything about it?” Madame Hsing exclaimed upon learning the issue. “Who else was present?” she proceeded to inquire.

“There was Miss P’ing!” was Chin’s wife’s reply.

“Shouldn’t you have given her a slap on the mouth?” lady Feng precipitately shouted. “As soon as I ever put my foot outside the door, she starts gadding about; and I never see so much as her shadow, when I get home. She too is bound to have had a hand in telling you something or other!”

“Miss P’ing wasn’t present,” Chin’s wife protested. “Looking from a distance it seemed to me like her; but I couldn’t see distinctly. It was a mere surmise on my part that it was she at all.”

“Go and fetch her at once!” lady Feng shouted to a servant. “Tell her that I’ve come home, and that Madame Hsing is also here and wants her to help her in her hurry.”

Feng Erh quickly came up to her. “Miss Lin,” she observed, “despatched a messenger for her, and asked her in writing three and four times before she at last went. I advised her to get back so soon as your ladyship stepped inside the gate, but ‘tell your mistress,’ Miss Lin said, ‘that I’ve put her to the inconvenience of coming round, as I’ve got something for her to do for me.’”

This explanation satisfied lady Feng and she let the matter drop. “What has she got to do,” she purposely went on to ask, “that she will trouble her day after day?”

Madame Hsing was driven to her wits’ ends. As soon as the meal was over, she returned home; and, in the evening, she communicated to Chia She the result of her errand. After some reflection, Chia She promptly summoned Chia Lien.

“There are other people in Nanking to look after our property,” he told him on his arrival; “there’s not only one family, so be quick and depute some one to go and summon Chin Ts’ai to come up to the capital.”

“Last night a letter arrived from Nanking,” Chia Lien rejoined, “to the effect that Chin Ts’ai had been suffering from some phlegm-obstruction in the channels of the heart. So a coffin and money were allowed from the other mansion. Whether he be dead or alive now, I don’t know. But even if alive, he must have lost all consciousness. It would therefore be a fruitless errand to send for him. His wife, on the other hand, is quite deaf.”

Hearing this, Chia She gave vent to an exclamation of reproof, and next launched into abuse. “You stupid and unreasonable rascal!” he shouted. “Is it

you of all people, who are up to those things? Don’t you yet bundle yourself off from my presence?”

Chia Lien withdrew out of the room in a state of trepidation. But in a short while, (Chia She) gave orders to call Chin Wen-hsiang. Chia Lien (meanwhile) remained in the outer study, for as he neither ventured to go home, nor presumed to face his father, his only alternative was to tarry behind. Presently, Chin Wen-hsiang arrived. The servant-lads led him straightway past the second gate; and he only came out again and took his departure after sufficient time had elapsed to enable one to have four or five meals in.

Chia Lien could not for long summon up courage enough to ask what was up, but when he found out, after a time, that Chia She had gone to sleep, he eventually crossed over to his quarters. In the course of the evening lady Feng told him the whole story. Then, at last, he understood the meaning of the excitement.

But to revert to Yüan Yang. She did not get, the whole night, a wink of sleep. On the morrow, her brother reported to dowager lady Chia that he would like to take her home on a visit. Dowager lady Chia accorded her consent and told her she could go and see her people. Yüan Yang, however, would have rather preferred to stay where she was, but the fear lest her old mistress should give way to suspicion, placed her under the necessity of going, much against her own inclinations though it was. Her brother then had no course but to lay before her Chia She’s proposal, and all his promises that she would occupy an honourable position, and that she would be a secondary wife, with control in the house; but Yüan Yang was so persistent in her refusal that her brother was quite nonplussed and he was compelled to return, and inform Chia She.

Chia She flew into a dreadful passion. “I’ll tell you what,” he shouted; “bid your wife go and tell her that I say: ‘that she must, like the goddess Ch’ang O herself who has from olden times shown a predilection for young people, only despise me for being advanced in years; that, as far as I can see, she must be hankering after some young men; that it must, most likely, be Pao-yü; but probably Lien Erh too! If she fosters these affections, warn her to at once set them at rest; for should she not come, when I’m ready to have her, who will by and bye venture to take her? This is the first thing. Should she imagine, in the next place, that because our venerable senior is fond of her, she may, in the future, be engaged to be married in the orthodox way, tell her to consider carefully that she won’t very

well be able to escape my grip, no matter in what family she may marry. That it's only in case of her dying or of her not wedding any one throughout her life that I shall submit to her decision. Under other circumstances, urge her to seize the first opportunity and change her mind, as she'll come in for many benefits.'"

To every remark that Chia She uttered, Chin Wen-hsiang acquiesced. "Yes!" he said.

"Mind you don't humbug me!" Chia She observed. "I shall tomorrow send again your mistress round to ask Yüan Yang. If you two have spoken to her, and she hasn't given a favorable answer, well, then, no blame will fall on you. But if she does assent, when she broaches the subject with her, look out for your heads!"

Chin Wen-hsiang eagerly expressed his obedience over and over again, and withdrawing out of the room, he retraced his footsteps homeward. Nor did he have the patience to wait until he could commission his womankind to speak to her. Indeed he went in person and told her face to face the injunctions entrusted to him. Yüan Yang was incensed to such a degree that she was at a loss what reply to make. "I'm quite ready to go," she rejoined, after some cogitation, "but you people must take me before my old mistress first and let me tell her something about it."

Her brother and sister-in-law flattered themselves that reflection had induced her to alter her previous decision, and they were both immeasurably delighted. Her sister-in-law there and then led her into the upper quarters and ushered her into the presence of old lady Chia. As luck would have it, Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, Li Wan, lady Feng, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls were, together with several respectable outside married women who acted as housekeepers, having some fun with old lady Chia. Yüan Yang observed where her mistress was seated, and hastily dragging her sister-in-law before her, she fell on her knees, and explained to her, with tears in her eyes, what proposal Madame Hsing had made to her, what her sister-in-law, who lived in the garden, had told her, and what message her brother had recently conveyed to her. "As I would not accept his advances," (she continued), "our senior master has just now gone so far as to insinuate 'that I was violently attached to Pao-yü; or if that wasn't the case, my object was to gain time so as to espouse some one outside. That were I even to go up to the very heavens, I couldn't, during my lifetime, escape his clutches, and that he would, in the long run, wreak his vengeance on me.' I have obstinately made up my mind, so I may state in the presence of all of you here,

that I'll, under no circumstances, marry, as long as I live, any man whatsoever, not to speak of his being a Pao-yü, (precious jade); but even a Pao Chin, (precious gold), a Pao Yin, (precious silver); a Pao T'ien Wang, (precious lord of heaven); or a Pao Huang Ti, (precious Emperor); and have done! Were even your venerable ladyship to press me to take such a step, I couldn't comply with your commands, though you may threaten to cut my throat with a sword. I'm quite prepared to wait upon your ladyship, till you depart this life; but go with my father, mother, or brother, I won't! I'll either commit suicide, or cut my hair off, and go and become a nun. If you fancy that I'm not in earnest, and that I'm temporarily using this language to put you off, may, as surely as heaven, earth, the spirits, the sun and moon look upon me, my throat be covered with boils!"

Yüan Yang had, in fact, upon entering the room, brought along a pair of scissors, concealed in her sleeve, and, while she spoke, she drew her hand back, and, dishevelling her tresses, she began to clip them. When the matrons and waiting-maids saw what she was up to, they hurriedly did everything they could to induce her to desist from her purpose; but already half of her locks had gone. And when they found on close inspection, that with the thick crop of hair she happily had, she had not succeeded in cutting it all, they immediately dressed it up for her.

Upon hearing of Chia She's designs, dowager lady Chia was provoked to displeasure. Her whole body trembled and shook. "Of all the attendants I've had," she cried, "there only remains this single one, upon whom I can depend, and now they want to conspire and carry her off!" Noticing then Madame Wang standing close to her, she turned herself towards her. "All you people really know is to impose upon me!" she resumed. "Outwardly, you display filial devotion; but, secretly, you plot and scheme against me. If I have aught that's worth having, you come and dun me for it. If I have any one who's nice, you come and ask for her. What's left to me is this low waiting-maid, but as you see that she serves me faithfully, you naturally can't stand it, and you're doing your utmost to estrange her from me so as to be the better able to play your tricks upon me."

Madame Wang quickly rose to her feet. She did not, however, dare to return a single syllable in self-defence.

Mrs. Hsüeh noticed that Madame Wang herself came in for her share of blame, and she did not feel as if she could any longer make an attempt to tender words

of advice. Li Wan, the moment she heard Yüan Yang speak in the strain she did, seized an early opportunity to lead the young ladies out of the room. T'an Ch'un was a girl with plenty of common sense, so reflecting within herself that Madame Wang could not, in spite of the insult heaped upon her, very well presume to say any thing to exculpate herself, that Mrs. Hsüeh could not, of course, in her position of sister, bring forward any arguments, that Pao-ch'ai was unable to explain things on behalf of her maternal aunt, and that Li Wan, lady Feng or Pao-yü could, still less, take upon themselves the right of censorship, she thought the opportunity rendered necessary the services of a daughter; but, as Ying Ch'un was so quiet, and Hsi Ch'un so young, she consequently walked in, no sooner did she overhear from outside the window what was said inside, and forcing a smile, she addressed herself to her grandmother. "How does this matter concern Madame Wang, my mother?" she interposed. "Venerable senior, just consider! This is a matter affecting her husband's eldest brother; and how could she, a junior sister-in-law, know anything about it?…"

But before she had exhausted all her arguments, dowager lady Chia's countenance thawed into a smile. "I've really grown stupid from old age!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Hsüeh, don't make fun of me! This eldest sister of yours is most reverent to me; and so unlike that senior lady of mine, who only knows how to regard her lord and master and to simply do things for the mere sake of appearances when she deals with her mother-in-law. I've therefore done her a wrong!"

Mrs. Hsüeh confined her reply to a 'yes.' "Dear senior, you're so full of prejudices," she afterwards observed, "that you love your youngest son's wife more than any one of the others; but it's quite natural."

"I have no prejudices," old lady Chia protested. "Pao-yü," she then proceeded, "I unjustly found fault with your mother; but, how was it that even you didn't tell me anything, but that you looked on, while she was having her feelings trampled upon?"

"Could I," smiled Pao-yü, "have taken my mother's part, and run down my senior uncle and aunt? If my mother did not bear the whole blame, upon whom could she throw it? And had I admitted that it was I who was entirely at fault, you, venerable ancestor, wouldn't have believed me."

"What you say is quite reasonable," his grandmother laughed. "So be quick and

fall on your knees before your mother and tell her: ‘mother, don’t feel aggrieved! Our old lady is so advanced in years. Do it for Pao-yü‘s sake!’”

At this suggestion, Pao-yü hastily crossed over, and dropping on his knees, he was about to open his lips, when Madame Wang laughingly pulled him up. “Get up,” she cried, “at once! This won’t do at all! Is it likely, pray, that you would tender apologies to me on behalf of our venerable ancestor?”

Hearing this, Pao-yü promptly stood up.

“Even that girl Feng didn’t call me to my senses,” dowager lady Chia smiled again.

“I don’t lay a word to your charge, worthy senior,” lady Feng remarked smilingly, “and yet you brand me with reproach!”

This rejoinder amused dowager lady Chia. “This is indeed strange!” she said to all around. “But I’d like to listen to these charges.”

“Who told you, dear senior,” lady Feng resumed, “to look after your attendants so well, and lavish such care on them as to make them plump and fine as water onions? How ever can you therefore bear people a grudge, if they ask for her hand? I’m, lucky for you, your grandson’s wife; for were I your grandson, I would long ere this have proposed to her. Would I have ever waited up to the present?”

“Is this any fault of mine?” dowager lady Chia laughed.

“Of course, it’s your fault, venerable senior!” lady Feng retorted with a smile.

“Well, in that case, I too don’t want her,” old lady Chia proceeded laughing. “Take her away, and have done!”

“Wait until I go through this existence,” lady Feng responded, “and, in the life to come, I’ll assume the form of a man and apply for her hand.”

“Take her along,” dowager lady Chia laughed, “and give her to Lien-Erh to attach to his apartments; and we’ll see whether that barefaced father-in-law of yours will still wish to have her or not.”

“Lien-Erh is not a match for her!” lady Feng added. “He’s only a fit mate for such as myself and P’ing Erh. A pair of loutish bumpkins like us to have anything to do with such a one as herself!”

At this rejoinder, they all exploded into a hearty fit of laughter. But a waiting-maid thereupon announced: “Our senior lady has come.” So Madame Wang immediately quitted the room to go and meet her.

But any further particulars, which you, reader may like to know, will be given in the following chapter; so listen to it.

CHAPTER XLVII.

An idiotic bully tries to be lewd and comes in for a sound thrashing. A cold-hearted fellow is prompted by a dread of trouble to betake himself to a strange place.

As soon as Madame Wang, so runs our narrative, heard of Madame Hsing’s arrival, she quickly went out to welcome her. Madame Hsing was not yet aware that dowager lady Chia had learnt everything connected with Yüan Yang’s affair, and she was coming again to see which way the wind blew. The moment, however, she stepped inside the courtyard-entrance, several matrons promptly explained to her, quite confidentially, that their old mistress had been told all only a few minutes back, and she meant to retrace her steps, (but she saw that) every inmate in the suite of rooms was already conscious of her presence. When she caught sight, besides, of Madame Wang walking out to meet her she had no option but to enter. First and foremost, she paid her respects to dowager lady Chia, but old lady Chia did not address her a single remark, so she felt within herself smitten with shame and remorse.

Lady Feng soon gave something or other as an excuse and withdrew. Yüan Yang then returned also quite alone to her chamber to give vent to her resentment; and Mrs. Hsüeh, Madame Wang and the other inmates, one by one, retired in like manner, for fear of putting Madame Hsing out of countenance. Madame Hsing, however, could not muster courage to beat a retreat. Dowager lady Chia noticed that there was no one but themselves in her apartments. “I hear,” she remarked,

“that you had come to play the part of a go-between for your lord and master! You can very well observe the three obediences and four virtues, but this softness of yours is a work of supererogation! You people have also got now a whole lot of grandchildren and sons. Do you still live in fear and trembling lest he should put his monkey up? Rumour has it that you yet let that disposition of your husband’s run riot!”

Madame Hsing’s whole face got suffused with blushes. “I advised him time and again,” she explained, “but he wouldn’t listen to me. How is it, venerable senior, that you don’t yet know that he turns a deaf ear to me? That’s why I had no choice in the matter!”

“Would you go and kill any one,” dowager lady Chia asked, “that he might instigate you to? But consider now. Your brother’s wife is naturally a quiet sort of person, and is born with many ailments; but is there anything, whether large or small, that she doesn’t go to the trouble of looking after? And notwithstanding that that daughter-in-law of yours lends her a helping hand, she is daily so busy that she ‘no sooner puts down the pick than she has to take up the broom.’ So busy, that I have myself now curtailed a hundred and one things. But whenever there’s anything those two can’t manage, there’s Yüan Yang to come to their assistance. She is, it’s true, a mere child, but nevertheless very careful; and knows how to concern herself about my affairs a bit; indenting for anything that need be indented, and availing herself of an opportunity to tell them to supply every requisite. Were Yüan Yang not the kind of girl she is, how could those two ladies not neglect a whole or part of those matters, both important as well as unimportant, connected with the inner and outer quarters? Would I not at present have to worry my own mind, instead of leaving things to others? Why, I’d daily have to rack my brain and go and ask them to give me whatever I might need! Of those girls, who’ve come to my quarters and those who’ve gone, there only remains this single one. She’s, besides other respects, somewhat older in years, and has as well a slight conception of my ways of doing things, and of my tastes. In the second place, she has managed to win her mistresses’ hearts, for she never tries to extort aught from me, or to dun this lady for clothes or that one for money. Hence it is that beginning from your sister-in-law and daughter-in-law down to the servants in the house, irrespective of old or young, there isn’t a soul, who doesn’t readily believe every single word she says in anything, no matter what it is! Not only do I thus have some one upon whom I can rely, but your young sister-in-law and your daughter-in-law are both as well spared much trouble. With a person such as this by me, should even my daughter-in-law and

granddaughter-in-law not have the time to think of anything, I am not left without it; nor am I given occasion to get my temper ruffled. But were she now to go, what kind of creature would they hunt up again to press into my service? Were you even to bring me a person made of real pearls, she'd be of no use; if she doesn't know how to speak! I was just about to send some one to go and explain to your husband that 'I've got money in here enough to buy any girl he fancies,' and to tell him that 'he's at liberty to give for her purchase from eight to ten thousand taels; that, if he has set his heart upon this girl, he can't however have her; and that by leaving her behind to attend to me, during the few years to come, it will be just the same as if he tried to acquit himself of his filial duties by waiting upon me day and night,' so you come at a very opportune moment. Were you therefore to go yourself at once and deliver him my message, it will answer the purpose far better!"

These words over, she called the servants. "Go," she said, "and ask Mrs. Hsüeh, and your young mistresses to come! We were in the middle of a chat full of zest, and how is it they've all dispersed?"

The waiting-maids immediately assented and left to go in search of their mistresses, one and all of whom promptly re-entered her apartments, with the sole exception of Mrs. Hsüeh.

"I've only now returned," she observed to the waiting-maid, "and what shall I go again for? Just tell her that I'm fast asleep!"

"Dearest Mrs. Hsüeh!" the waiting-maid pleaded, "my worthy senior! our old mistress will get angry. If you, venerable lady, don't appear nothing will appease her; so do it for the love of us! Should you object to walking, why I'm quite ready to carry you on my back."

"You little imp!" Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. "What are you afraid of? All she'll do will be to scold you a little; and it will all be over soon!"

While replying, she felt that she had no course but to retrace her footsteps, in company with the waiting-maid.

Dowager lady Chia at once motioned her into a seat. "Let's have a game of cards!" she then smilingly proposed. "You, Mrs. Hsüeh, are not a good hand at them; so let's sit together, and see that lady Feng doesn't cheat us!"

“Quite so,” laughed Mrs. Hsüeh. “But it will be well if your venerable ladyship would look over my hand a bit! Are we four ladies to play, or are we to add one or two more persons to our number?”

“Naturally only four!” Madame Wang smiled.

“Were one more player let in,” lady Feng interposed, “it would be merrier!”

“Call Yüan Yang here,” old lady Chia suggested, “and make her take this lower seat; for as Mrs. Hsüeh’s eyesight is rather dim, we’ll charge her to look over our two hands a bit.”

“You girls know how to read and write,” lady Feng remarked with a smile, addressing herself to T’an Ch’un, “and why don’t you learn fortune-telling?”

“This is again strange!” T’an Ch’un exclaimed. “Instead of bracing up your energies now to rook some money out of our venerable senior, you turn your thoughts to fortune-telling!”

“I was just wishing to consult the fates,” lady Feng proceeded, “as to how much I shall lose to-day. Can I ever dream of winning? Why, look here. We haven’t commenced playing, and they have placed themselves in ambush on the left and right.”

This remark amused dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh. But presently Yüan Yang arrived, and seated herself below her old mistress. After Yüan Yang sat lady Feng. The red cloth was then spread; the cards were shuffled; the dealer was decided upon and the quintet began to play. After the game had gone on for a time, Yüan Yang noticed that dowager lady Chia had a full hand and was only waiting for one two-spotted card, and she made a secret sign to lady Feng. Lady Feng was about to lead, but purposely lingered for a few moments. “This card will, for a certainty, be snatched by Mrs. Hsüeh,” she smiled, “yet if I don’t play this one, I won’t be able later to come out with what I want.”

“I haven’t got any cards you want in my hand,” Mrs. Hsüeh remarked.

“I mean to see by and bye,” lady Feng resumed.

“You’re at liberty to see,” Mrs. Hsüeh said. “But go on, play now! Let me look what card it is.”

Lady Feng threw the card in front of Mrs. Hsüeh. At a glance, Mrs. Hsüeh perceived that it was the two spot. “I don’t fancy this card,” she smiled. “What I fear is that our dear senior will get a full hand.”

“I’ve played wrong!” lady Feng laughingly exclaimed at these words.

Dowager lady Chia laughed, and throwing down her cards, “If you dare,” she shouted, “take it back! Who told you to play the wrong card?”

“Didn’t I want to have my fortune told?” lady Feng observed. “I played this card of my own accord, so there’s no one with whom I can find fault.”

“You should then beat your own lips and punish your own self; it’s only fair;” old lady Chia remarked. Then facing Mrs. Hsüeh, “I’m not a niggard, fond of winning money,” she went on to say, “but it was my good luck!”

“Don’t we too think as much?” Mrs. Hsüeh smiled. “Who’s there stupid enough to say that your venerable ladyship’s heart is set upon money?”

Lady Feng was busy counting the cash, but catching what was said, she restrung them without delay. “I’ve got my share,” she said, laughingly to the company. “It isn’t at all that you wish to win. It’s your good luck that made you come out a winner! But as for me, I am really a mean creature; and, as I managed to lose, I count the money and put it away at once.”

Dowager lady Chia usually made Yüan Yang shuffle the cards for her, but being engaged in chatting and joking with Mrs. Hsüeh, she did not notice Yüan Yang take them in hand. “Why is it you’re so huffed,” old lady Chia asked, “that you don’t even shuffle for me?”

“Lady Feng won’t let me have the money!” Yüan Yang replied, picking up the cards.

“If she doesn’t give the money,” dowager lady Chia observed, “it will be a turning-point in her luck. Take that string of a thousand cash of hers,” she accordingly directed a servant, “and bring it bodily over here!”

A young waiting-maid actually fetched the string of cash and deposited it by the side of her old mistress.

“Let me have them,” lady Feng eagerly cried smiling, “and I’ll square all that’s due, and finish.”

“In very truth, lady Feng, you’re a miserly creature!” Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. “It’s simply for mere fun, nothing more!”

Lady Feng, at this insinuation, speedily stood up, and, laying her hand on Mrs. Hsüeh, she turned her head round, and pointed at a large wooden box, in which old lady Chia usually deposited her money. “Aunt,” she said, a smile curling her lips, “look here! I couldn’t tell you how much there is in that box that was won from me! This tiao will be wheedled by the cash in it, before we’ve played for half an hour! All we’ve got to do is to give them sufficient time to lure this string in as well; we needn’t trouble to touch the cards. Your temper, worthy ancestor, will thus calm down. If you’ve also got any legitimate thing for me to do, you might bid me go and attend to it!”

This joke had scarcely been concluded than it evoked incessant laughter from dowager lady Chia and every one else. But while she was bandying words, P’ing Erh happened to bring her another string of cash prompted by the apprehension that her capital might not suffice to meet her wants.

“It’s useless putting them in front of me!” lady Feng cried. “Place these too over there by our old lady and let them be wheedled in along with the others! It will thus save trouble, as there won’t be any need to make two jobs of them, to the inconvenience of the cash already in the box.”

Dowager lady Chia had a hearty laugh, so much so, that the cards, she held in her hand, flew all over the table; but pushing Yüan Yang. “Be quick,” she shouted, “and wrench that mouth of hers!”

P’ing Erh placed the cash according to her mistress’ directions. But after indulging too in laughter for a time, she retraced her footsteps. On reaching the entrance into the court, she met Chia Lien. “Where’s your Madame Hsing?” he inquired. “Mr. Chia She told me to ask her to go round.”

“She’s been standing in there with our old mistress,” P’ing Erh hastily laughed, “for ever so long, and yet she isn’t inclined to budge! Seize the earliest opportunity you can get to wash your hands clean of this business! Our old lady has had a good long fit of fuming and raging. Luckily, our lady Secunda cracked an endless stock of jokes, so she, at length, got a bit calmer!”

“I’ll go over,” Chia Lien said. “All I have to do is to find out our venerable senior’s wishes, as to whether she means to go to Lai Ta’s house on the fourteenth, so that I might have time to get the chairs ready. As I’ll be able to tell Madame Hsing to return, and have a share of the fun, won’t it be well for me to go?”

“My idea is,” P’ing Erh suggested laughingly, “that you shouldn’t put your foot in there! Every one, even up to Madame Wang, and Pao-yü, have alike received a rap on the knuckles, and are you also going now to fill up the gap?”

“Everything is over long ago,” Chia Lien observed, “and can it be that she’ll cap the whole thing by blowing me up too? What’s more, it’s no concern of mine. In the next place, Mr. Chia She enjoined me that I was to go in person, and ask his wife round, so, if I at present depute some one else, and he comes to know about it, he really won’t feel in a pleasant mood, and he’ll take advantage of this pretext to give vent to his spite on me.”

These words over, he quickly marched off. And P’ing Erh was so impressed with the reasonableness of his arguments, that she followed in his track.

As soon as Chia Lien reached the reception hall, he trod with a light step. Then peeping in he saw Madame Hsing standing inside. Lady Feng, with her eagle eye, was the first to espy him. But she winked at him and dissuaded him from coming in, and next gave a wink to Madame Hsing. Madame Hsing could not conveniently get away at once, and she had to pour a cup of tea, and place it in front of dowager lady Chia. But old lady Chia jerked suddenly round, and took Chia Lien at such a disadvantage that he found it difficult to beat a retreat. “Who is outside?” exclaimed old lady Chia. “It seemed to me as if some servant-boy had poked his head in.”

Lady Feng sprung to her feet without delay. “I also,” she interposed, “indistinctly noticed the shadow of some one.”

Saying this, she walked away and quitted the room. Chia Lien entered with hasty step. Forcing a smile, “I wanted to ask,” he remarked, “whether you, venerable senior, are going out on the fourteenth, so that the chairs may be got ready.”

“In that case,” dowager lady Chia rejoined, “why didn’t you come straight in; but behaved again in that mysterious way?”

“I saw that you were playing at cards, dear ancestor,” Chia Lien explained with a strained laugh, “and I didn’t venture to come and disturb you. I therefore simply meant to call my wife out to find out from her.”

“Is it anything so very urgent that you had to say it this very moment?” old lady Chia continued. “Had you waited until she had gone home, couldn’t you have asked her any amount of questions you may have liked? When have you been so full of zeal before? I’m puzzled to know whether it isn’t as an eavesdropping spirit that you appear on the scene; nor can I say whether you don’t come as a spy. But that impish way of yours gave me quite a start! What a low-bred fellow you are! Your wife will play at cards with me for a good long while more, so you’d better bundle yourself home, and conspire again with Chao Erh’s wife how to do away with your better half.”

Her remarks evoked general merriment.

“It’s Pao Erh’s wife,” Yüan Yang put in laughingly, “and you, worthy senior, have dragged in again Chao Erh’s wife.”

“Yes!” assented old lady Chia, likewise with a laugh. “How could I remember whether he wasn’t (pao) embracing her, or (pei) carrying her on his back. The bare mention of these things makes me lose all self-control and provokes me to anger! Ever since I crossed these doors as a great grandson’s wife, I have never, during the whole of these fifty-four years, seen anything like these affairs, albeit it has been my share to go through great frights, great dangers, thousands of strange things and hundred and one remarkable occurrences! Don’t you yet pack yourself off from my presence?”

Chia Lien could not muster courage to utter a single word to vindicate himself, but retired out of the room with all promptitude. P’ing Erh was standing outside the window. “I gave you due warning in a gentle tone, but you wouldn’t hear; you’ve, after all, rushed into the very meshes of the net!”

These reproaches were still being heaped on him when he caught sight of Madame Hsing, as she likewise made her appearance outside. “My father,” Chia Lien ventured, “is at the bottom of all this trouble; and the whole blame now is shoved upon your shoulders as well as mine, mother.”

“I’ll take you, you unfilial thing and…” Madame Hsing shouted. “People lay down their lives for their fathers; and you are prompted by a few harmless

remarks to murmur against heaven and grumble against earth! Won't you behave in a proper manner? He's in high dudgeon these last few days, so mind he doesn't give you a pounding!"

"Mother, cross over at once," Chia Lien urged; "for he told me to come and ask you to go a long time ago."

Pressing his mother, he escorted her outside as far as the other part of the mansion. Madame Hsing gave (her husband) nothing beyond a general outline of all that had been recently said; but Chia She found himself deprived of the means of furthering his ends. Indeed, so stricken was he with shame that from that date he pleaded illness. And so little able was he to rally sufficient pluck to face old lady Chia, that he merely commissioned Madame Hsing and Chia Lien to go daily and pay their respects to her on his behalf. He had no help too but to despatch servants all over the place to make every possible search and inquiry for a suitable concubine for him. After a long time they succeeded in purchasing, for the sum of eighty taels, a girl of seventeen years of age, Yen Hung by name, whom he introduced as secondary wife into his household.

But enough of this subject. In the rooms on the near side, they protracted for a long time their noisy game of cards, and only broke up after they had something to eat. Nothing worthy of note, however, occurred during the course of the following day or two. In a twinkle, the fourteenth drew near. At an early hour before daybreak, Lai Ta's wife came again into the mansion to invite her guests. Dowager lady Chia was in buoyant spirits, so taking along Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-yü and the various young ladies, she betook herself into Lai Ta's garden, where she sat for a considerable time.

This garden was not, it is true, to be compared with the garden of Broad Vista; but it also was most beautifully laid out, and consisted of spacious grounds. In the way of springs, rockeries, arbours and woods, towers and terraces, pavilions and halls, it likewise contained a good many sufficient to excite admiration. In the main hall outside, were assembled Hsüeh P'an, Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Jung and several close relatives. But Lai Ta had invited as well a number of officials, still in active service, and numerous young men of wealthy families, to keep them company. Among that party figured one Liu Hsiang-lien, whom Hsüeh P'an had met on a previous occasion and kept ever since in constant remembrance. Having besides discovered that he had a passionate liking for theatricals, and that the parts he generally filled were those of a young man or

lady, in fast plays, he had unavoidably misunderstood the object with which he indulged in these amusements, to such a degree as to misjudge him for a young rake. About this time, he had been entertaining a wish to cultivate intimate relations with him, but he had, much to his disgust, found no one to introduce him, so when he, by a strange coincidence, came to be thrown in his way, on the present occasion, he revelled in intense delight. But Chia Chen and the other guests had heard of his reputation, so as soon as wine had blinded their sense of shame, they entreated him to sing two short plays; and when subsequently they got up from the banquet, they ensconced themselves near him, and, pressing him with questions, they carried on a conversation on one thing and then another.

This Liu Hsiang-lien was, in fact, a young man of an old family; but he had been unsuccessful in his studies, and had lost his father and mother. He was naturally light-hearted and magnanimous; not particular in minor matters; immoderately fond of spear-exercise and fencing, of gambling and boozing; even going to such excesses as spending his nights in houses of easy virtue; playing the fife, thrumming the harp, and going in for everything and anything. Being besides young in years, and of handsome appearance, those who did not know what his standing was, invariably mistook him for an actor. But Lai Ta's son had all along been on such friendly terms with him, that he consequently invited him for the nonce to help him do the honours.

Of a sudden, while every one was, after the wines had gone round, still on his good behaviour, Hsüeh P'an alone got another fit of his old mania. From an early stage, his spirits sunk within him and he would fain have seized the first convenient moment to withdraw and consummate his designs but for Lai Shang-jung, who then said: "Our Mr. Pao-yü told me again just now that although he saw you, as he walked in, he couldn't speak to you with so many people present, so he bade me ask you not to go, when the party breaks up, as he has something more to tell you. But as you insist upon taking your leave, you'd better wait until I call him out, and when you've seen each other, you can get away; I'll have nothing to say then."

While delivering the message, "Go inside," he directed the servant-boys, "and get hold of some old matron and tell her quietly to invite Mr. Pao-yü to come out."

A servant-lad went on the errand, and scarcely had time enough elapsed to enable one to have a cup of tea in, than Pao-yü, actually, made his appearance

outside.

“My dear sir,” Lai Shang-jung smilingly observed to Pao-yü, “I hand him over to you. I’m going to entertain the guests!”

With these words, he was off.

Pao-yü pulled Lia Hsiang-lien into a side study in the hall, where they sat down.

“Have you been recently to Ch’in Ch’ung’s grave?” he inquired of him.

“How could I not go?” Hsiang-lien answered. “The other day a few of us went out to give our falcons a fly; and we were yet at a distance of two li from his tomb, when remembering the heavy rains, we’ve had this summer, I gave way to fears lest his grave may not have been proof against them; so evading the notice of the party I went over and had a look. I found it again slightly damaged; but when I got back home, I speedily raised a few hundreds of cash, and issued early on the third day, and hired two men, who put it right.”

“It isn’t strange then!” exclaimed Pao-yü, “When the lotus blossomed last month in the pond of our garden of Broad Vista, I plucked ten of them and bade T’sai Ming go out of town and lay them as my offering on his grave. On his return, I also inquired of him: whether it had been damaged by the water or not; and he explained that not only had it not sustained any harm, but that it looked better than when last he’d seen it. Several of his friends, I argued, must have had it put in proper repair; and I felt it irksome that I should, day after day, be so caged at home as to be unable to be my own master in the least thing, and that if even I move, and any one comes to know of it, this one is sure to exhort me, if that one does not restrain me. I can thus afford to brag, but can’t manage to act! And though I’ve got plenty of money, I’m not at liberty to spend any of it!”

“There’s no use your worrying in a matter like this!” Liu Hsiang-lien said. “I am outside, so all you need do is to inwardly foster the wish; that’s all. But as the first of the tenth moon will shortly be upon us, I’ve already prepared the money necessary for going to the graves. You know well enough that I’m as poor as a rat; I’ve no hoardings at home; and when a few cash find their way into my pocket, I soon remain again quite empty-handed. But I’d better make the best of this opportunity, and keep the amount I have, in order that, when the time comes, I mayn’t find myself without a cash.”

“It’s exactly about this that I meant to send Pei Ming to see you,” Pao-yü added. “But it isn’t often that one can manage to find you at home. I’m well aware how uncertain your movements are; one day you are here, and another there; you’ve got no fixed resort.”

“There’s no need sending any one to hunt me up!” Liu Hsiang-lien replied. “All that each of us need do in this matter is to acquit ourselves of what’s right. But in a little while, I again purpose going away on a tour abroad, to return in three to five years’ time.”

When Pao-yü heard his intention, “Why is this?” he at once inquired.

Liu Hsiang-lien gave a sardonic smile. “When my wish is on a fair way to be accomplished,” he said, “you’ll certainly hear everything. I must now leave you.”

“After all the difficulty we’ve had in meeting,” Pao-yü remarked, “wouldn’t it be better were you and I to go away together in the evening?”

“That worthy cousin of yours,” Hsiang-lien rejoined, “is as bad as ever, and were I to stay any longer, trouble would inevitably arise. So it’s as well that I should clear out of his way.”

Pao-yü communed with himself for a time. “In that case,” he then observed, “it’s only right, that you should retire. But if you really be bent upon going on a distant tour, you must absolutely tell me something beforehand. Don’t, on any account, sneak away quietly!”.

As he spoke, the tears trickled down his cheeks.

“I shall, of course, say goodbye to you,” Liu Hsiang-lien rejoined. “But you must not let any one know anything about it!”

While uttering these words, he stood up to get away. “Go in at once,” he urged, “there’s no need to see me off!”

Saying this, he quitted the study. As soon as he reached the main entrance, he came across Hsüeh P’an, bawling out boisterously, “Who let young Liu-erh go?”

The moment these shouts fell on Liu Hsiang-lien’s ear, his anger flared up as if it

had been sparks spurting wildly about, and he only wished he could strike him dead with one blow. But on second consideration, he pondered that a fight after the present festive occasion would be an insult to Lai Shang-jung, and he perforce felt bound to stifle his indignation.

When Hsüeh P'an suddenly espied him walking out, he looked as delighted as if he had come in for some precious gem. With staggering step he drew near him. Clutching him with one grip, "My dear brother," he smirked. "where are you off to?"

"I'm going somewhere, but will be back soon," Hsiang-lien said by way of response.

"As soon as you left," Hsüeh P'an smiled, "all the fun went. But pray sit a while! If you do so, it will be a proof of your regard for me! Don't flurry yourself. With such a senior brother as myself to stand by you, it will be as easy a job for you to become an official as to reap a fortune."

The sight of his repulsive manner filled the heart of Hsiang-lien with disgust and shame. But speedily devising a plan, he drew him to a secluded spot. "Is your friendship real," he smiled, "or is it only a sham?"

This question sent Hsüeh P'an into such raptures that he found it difficult to check himself from gratifying his longings. But glancing at him with the corner of his eye, "My dear brother," he smiled, "what makes you ask me such a thing? If my friendship for you is a sham, may I die this moment, before your very eyes."

"Well, if that be so," Hsiang-lien proceeded, "it isn't convenient in here, so sit down and wait a bit. I'll go ahead, but come out of this yourself by and bye, and follow me to my place, where we can drink the whole night long. I've also got there two first-rate young fellows who never go out of doors. But don't bring so much as a single follower with you, as you'll find, when you get there, plenty of people ready at hand to wait on you."

So high did this assignation raise Hsüeh P'an's spirits that he recovered, to a certain extent, from the effects of wine. "Is it really so?" he asked.

"How is it," Hsiang-lien laughed, "that when people treat you with a sincere heart, you don't, after all, believe them?"

“I’m no fool,” eagerly exclaimed Hsüeh P’an, “and how could I not believe you? But since this be the case, how am I, who don’t even know the way, to find your whereabouts if you are to go ahead of me?”

“My place is outside the northern gate.” Hsiang-lien explained. “But can you tear yourself away from your home to spend the night outside the city walls?”

“As long as you’re there,” Hsüeh P’an said, “what will I want my home for?”

“If that be so,” Hsiang-lien resumed, “I’ll wait for you on the bridge outside the northern gate. But let us meanwhile rejoin the banquet and have some wine. Come along, after you’ve seen me go; they won’t notice us then.”

“Yes!” shouted Hsüeh P’an with alacrity as he acquiesced to the proposal.

The two young fellows thereupon returned to the feast, and drank for a time. Hsüeh Pan, however, could with difficulty endure the suspense. He kept his gaze intent upon Hsiang-lien; and the more he pondered within himself upon what was coming, the more exuberance swelled in his heart. Now he emptied one wine-kettle; now another; and, without waiting for any one to press him, he, of his own accord, gulped down one drink after another, with the result that he unconsciously made himself nearly quite tipsy. Hsiang-lien then got up and quitted the room, and perceiving every one off his guard, he egressed out of the main entrance. “Go home ahead,” he directed his page Hsing Nu. “I’m going out of town, but I’ll be back at once.”

By the time he had finished giving him these directions, he had already mounted his horse, and straightway he proceeded to the bridge beyond the northern gate, and waited for Hsüeh P’an. A long while elapsed, however, before he espied Hsüeh P’an in the distance, hurrying along astride of a high steed, with gaping mouth, staring eyes, and his head, banging from side to side like a pedlar’s drum. Without intermission, he glanced confusedly about, sometimes to the left, and sometimes to the right; but, as soon as he got where he had to pass in front of Hsiang-lien’s horse, he kept his gaze fixed far away, and never troubled his mind with the immediate vicinity.

Hsiang-lien felt amused and angry with him, but forthwith giving his horse also the rein, he followed in his track, while Hsüeh P’an continued to stare ahead.

Little by little the habitations got scantier and scantier, so pulling his horse

round, (Hsüeh P’an) retraced his steps. The moment he turned back, he unawares caught sight of Hsiang-lien, and his spirits rose within him, as if he had got hold of some precious thing of an extraordinary value. “I knew well enough,” he eagerly smiled, “that you weren’t one to break faith.”

“Quick, let’s go ahead!” Hsiang-lien smilingly urged. “Mind people might notice us and follow us. It won’t then be nice!”

While instigating him, he took the lead, and letting his horse have the rein, he wended his way onwards, followed closely by Hsüeh P’an. But when Hsiang-lien perceived that the country ahead of them was already thinly settled and saw besides a stretch of water covered with a growth of weeds, he speedily dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree. Turning then round; “Get down!” he said, laughingly, to Hsüeh P’an. “You must first take an oath, so that in the event of your changing your mind in the future, and telling anything to anyone, the oath might be accomplished.”

“You’re quite right!” Hsüeh P’an smiled; and jumping down with all despatch, he too made his horse fast to a tree, and then crouched on his knees.

“If I ever in days to come,” he exclaimed, “know any change in my feelings and breathe a word to any living soul, may heaven blast me and earth annihilate me!”

Scarcely had he ended this oath, when a crash fell on his ear, and lo, he felt as if an iron hammer had been brought down to bear upon him from behind. A black mist shrouded his eyes, golden stars flew wildly about before his gaze; and losing all control over himself, he sprawled on the ground.

Hsiang-lien approached and had a look at him; and, knowing how little he was accustomed to thrashings, he only exerted but little of his strength, and struck him a few blows on the face. But about this time a fruit shop happened to open, and Hsüeh P’an strained at first every nerve to rise to his feet, when another slight kick from Hsiang-lien tumbled him over again.

“Both parties should really be agreeable,” he shouted. “But if you were not disposed to accept my advances, you should have simply told me in a proper way. And why did you beguile me here to give me a beating?”

So speaking, he went on boisterously to heap invective upon his head.

“I’ll take you, you blind fellow, and show you who Mr. Liu is,” Hsiang-lien cried. “You don’t appeal to me with solicitous entreaties, but go on abusing me! To kill you would be of no use, so I’ll merely give you a good lesson!”

With these words, he fetched his whip, and administered him, thirty or forty blows from his back down to his shins.

Hsüeh P’an had sobered down considerably from the effects of wine, and found the stings of pain so intolerable, that little able to restrain himself, he gave way to groans.

“Do you go on in this way?” Hsiang-lien said, with an ironical smile. “Why, I thought you were not afraid of beatings.”

While uttering this taunt, he seized Hsüeh P’an by the left leg, and dragging him several steps into a miry spot among the reeds, he rolled him about till he was covered with one mass of mud. “Do you now know what stuff I’m made of?” he proceeded to ask.

Hsüeh P’an made no reply. But simply lay prostrate, and moaned. Then throwing away his whip Hsiang-lien gave him with his fist several thumps all over the body.

Hsüeh P’an began to wriggle violently and vociferate wildly. “Oh, my ribs are broken!” he shouted. “I know you’re a proper sort of person! It’s all because I made the mistake of listening to other people’s gossip!”

“There’s no need for you to drag in other people!” Hsiang-lien went on. “Just confine yourself to those present!”

“There’s nothing up at present!” Hsüeh P’an cried. “From what you say, you’re a person full of propriety. So it’s I who am at fault.”

“You’ll have to speak a little milder,” Hsiang-lien added, “before I let you off.”

“My dear younger brother,” Hsüeh P’an pleaded, with a groan.

Hsiang-lien at this struck him another blow with his fist.

“Ai!” ejaculated Hsüeh P’an. “My dear senior brother!” he exclaimed.

Hsiang-lien then gave him two more whacks, one after the other.

“Ai Yo!” Hsüeh P’an precipitately screamed. “My dear Sir, do spare me, an eyeless beggar; and henceforth I’ll look up to you with veneration; I’ll fear you!”

“Drink two mouthfuls of that water!” shouted Hsiang-lien.

“That water is really too foul,” Hsüeh P’an argued, in reply to this suggestion, wrinkling his eyebrows the while; “and how could I put any of it in my mouth?”

Hsiang-lien raised his fist and struck him.

“I’ll drink it, I’ll drink it!” quickly bawled Hsüeh P’an.

So saying, he felt obliged to lower his head to the very roots of the reeds and drink a mouthful. Before he had had time to swallow it, a sound of ‘ai’ became audible, and up came all the stuff he had put into his mouth only a few seconds back.

“You filthy thing!” exclaimed Hsiang-lien. “Be quick and finish drinking; and I’ll let you off.”

Upon hearing this, Hsüeh P’an bumped his head repeatedly on the ground. “Do please,” he cried, “lay up a store of meritorious acts for yourself and let me off! I couldn’t take that were I even on the verge of death!”

“This kind of stench will suffocate me!” Hsiang-lien observed, and, with this remark, he abandoned Hsüeh Pan to his own devices; and, pulling his horse, he put his foot to the stirrup, and rode away.

Hsüeh Pan, meanwhile, became aware of his departure, and felt at last relieved in his mind. Yet his conscience pricked him for he saw that he should not misjudge people. He then made an effort to raise himself, but the racking torture he experienced all over his limbs was so sharp that he could with difficulty bear it.

Chia Chen and the other guests present at the banquet became, as it happened, suddenly alive to the fact that the two young fellows had disappeared; but though they extended their search everywhere, they saw nothing of them. Some one insinuated, in an uncertain way, that they had gone outside the northern gate;

but as Hsüeh P'an's pages had ever lived in dread of him, who of them had the audacity to go and hunt him up after the injunctions, he had given them, that they were not to follow him? But waxing solicitous on his account, Chia Chen subsequently bade Chia Jung take a few servant-boys and go and discover some clue of him, or institute inquiries as to his whereabouts. Straightway therefore they prosecuted their search beyond the northern gate, to a distance of two li below the bridge, and it was quite by accident that they discerned Hsüeh P'an's horse made fast by the side of a pit full of reeds.

"That's a good sign!" they with one voice exclaimed; "for if the horse is there, the master must be there too!"

In a body, they thronged round the horse, when, from among the reeds, they caught the sound of human groans, so hurriedly rushing forward to ascertain for themselves, they, at a glance, perceived Hsüeh P'an, his costume all in tatters, his countenance and eyes so swollen and bruised that it was hard to make out the head and face, and his whole person, inside as well as outside his clothes, rolled like a sow in a heap of mud.

Chia Jung surmised pretty nearly the truth. Speedily dismounting, he told the servants to prop him up. "Uncle Hsüeh," he laughed, "you daily go in for lewd dalliance; but have you to-day come to dissipate in a reed-covered pit? The King of the dragons in this pit must have also fallen in love with your charms, and enticed you to become his son-in-law that you've come and gored yourself on his horns like this!"

Hsüeh P'an was such a prey to intense shame that he would fain have grovelled into some fissure in the earth had he been able to detect any. But so little able was he to get on his horse that Chia Jung directed a servant to run to the suburbs and fetch a chair. Ensconced in this, Hsüeh P'an entered town along with the search party.

Chia Jung still insisted upon carrying him to Lai Ta's house to join the feast, so Hsüeh P'an had to make a hundred and one urgent appeals to him to tell no one, before Chia Jung eventually yielded to his solicitations and allowed him to have his own way and return home.

Chia Jung betook himself again to Lai Ta's house, and narrated to Chia Chen their recent experiences. When Chia Chen also learnt of the flogging (Hsüeh

P’an) had received from Hsiang-lien, he laughed. “It’s only through scrapes,” he cried, “that he’ll get all right!”

In the evening, after the party broke up, he came to inquire after him. But Hsüeh P’an, who was lying all alone in his bedroom, nursing himself, refused to see him, on the plea of indisposition.

When dowager lady Chia and the other inmates had returned home, and every one had retired into their respective apartments, Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch’ai observed that Hsiang Ling’s eyes were quite swollen from crying, and they questioned her as to the reason of her distress. (On being told), they hastily rushed to look up Hsüeh P’an; but, though they saw his body covered with scars, they could discover no ribs broken, or bones dislocated.

Mrs. Hsüeh fell a prey to anguish and displeasure. At one time, she scolded Hsüeh P’an; at another, she abused Liu Hsiang-lien. Her wish was to lay the matter before Madame Wang in order that some one should be despatched to trace Liu Hsiang-lien and bring him back, but Pao-ch’ai speedily dissuaded her. “It’s nothing to make a fuss about,” she represented. “They were simply drinking together; and quarrels after a wine bout are ordinary things. And for one who’s drunk to get a few whacks more or less is nothing uncommon! Besides, there’s in our home neither regard for God nor discipline. Every one knows it. If it’s purely out of love, mother, that you desire to give vent to your spite, it’s an easy matter enough. Have a little patience for three or five days, until brother is all right and can go out. Mr. Chia Chen and Mr. Chia Lien over there are not people likely to let the affair drop without doing anything! They’ll, for a certainty, stand a treat, and ask that fellow, and make him apologise and admit his wrong in the presence of the whole company, so that everything will be properly settled. But were you now, ma, to begin making much of this occurrence, and telling every one, it would, on the contrary, look as if you had, in your motherly partiality and fond love for him, indulged him to stir up a row and provoke people! He has, on this occasion, had unawares to eat humble pie, but will you, ma, put people to all this trouble and inconvenience and make use of the prestige enjoyed by your relatives to oppress an ordinary person?”

“My dear child,” Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined, “after listening to the advice proffered by her, you’ve, after all, been able to foresee all these things! As for me, that sudden fit of anger quite dazed me!”

“All will thus be square,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “for, as he’s neither afraid of you, mother, nor gives an ear to people’s exhortations, but gets wilder and wilder every day that goes by, he may, if he gets two or three lessons, turn over a new leaf.”

While Hsüeh P’an lay on the stovecouch, he reviled Hsiang-lien with all his might. Next, he instigated the servant-boys to go and demolish his house, kill him and bring a charge against him. But Mrs. Hsüeh hindered the lads from carrying out his purpose, and explained to her son: “that Liu Hsiang-lien had casually, after drinking, behaved in a disorderly way, that now that he was over the effects of wine, he was exceedingly filled with remorse, and that, prompted by the fear of punishment, he had effected his escape.”

But, reader, if you feel any interest to know what happened when Hsüeh P’an heard the version his mother gave him, listen to what you will find in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A sensual-minded man gets into such trouble through his sensuality that he entertains the idea of going abroad. An estimable and refined girl manages, after great exertion, to compose verses at a refined meeting.

But to resume our story. After hearing his mother’s arguments, Hsüeh P’an’s indignation gradually abated. But notwithstanding that his pains and aches completely disappeared, in three or five days’ time, the scars of his wounds were not yet healed and shamming illness, he remained at home; so ashamed was he to meet any of his relations or friends.

In a twinkle, the tenth moon drew near; and as several among the partners in the various shops, with which he was connected, wanted to go home, after the settlement of the annual accounts, he had to give them a farewell spread at home. In their number was one Chang Te-hui, who from his early years filled the post of manager in Hsüeh P’an’s pawnshop; and who enjoyed in his home a living of two or three thousand taels. His purpose too was to visit his native place this year, and to return the following spring.

“Stationery and perfumery have been so scarce this year,” he consequently represented, “that prices will next year inevitably be high; so when next year comes, what I’ll do will be to send up my elder and younger sons ahead of me to look after the pawnshop, and when I start on my way back, before the dragon festival, I’ll purchase a stock of paper, scents and fans and bring them for sale. And though we’ll have to reduce the duties, payable at the barriers, and other expenses, there will still remain for us a considerable percentage of profit.”

This proposal set Hsüeh P’an musing, “With the dressing I’ve recently had,” he pondered, “I cannot very well, at present, appear before any one. Were the fancy to take me to get out of the way for half a year or even a year, there isn’t a place where I can safely retire. And to sham illness, day after day, isn’t again quite the right thing! In addition to this, here I’ve reached this grown-up age, and yet I’m neither a civilian nor a soldier. It’s true I call myself a merchant; but I’ve never in point of fact handled the scales or the abacus. Nor do I know anything about our territories, customs and manners, distances and routes. So wouldn’t it be advisable that I should also get ready some of my capital, and go on a tour with Chang Te-hui for a year or so? Whether I earn any money or not, will be equally immaterial to me. More, I shall escape from all disgrace. It will, secondly, be a good thing for me to see a bit of country.”

This resolution once arrived at in his mind, he waited until they rose from the banquet, when he, with calmness and equanimity, brought his plans to Chang Te-hui’s cognizance, and asked him to postpone his departure for a day or two so that they should proceed on the journey together.

In the evening, he imparted the tidings to his mother. Mrs. Hsüeh, upon hearing his intention, was albeit delighted, tormented with fresh misgivings lest he should stir up trouble abroad,—for as far as the expense was concerned she deemed it a mere bagatelle,—and she consequently would not permit him to go. “You have,” she reasoned with him, “to take proper care of me, so that I may be able to live in peace. Another thing is, that you can well dispense with all this buying and selling, for you are in no need of the few hundreds of taels, you may make.”

Hsüeh P’an had long ago thoroughly resolved in his mind what to do and he did not therefore feel disposed to listen to her remonstrances. “You daily tax me,” he pleaded, “with being ignorant of the world, with not knowing this, and not learning that, and now that I stir up my good resolution, with the idea of putting

an end to all trifling, and that I wish to become a man, to do something for myself, and learn how to carry on business, you won't let me! But what would you have me do? Besides I'm not a girl that you should coop me up at home! And when is this likely to come to an end? Chang Te-hui is, moreover, a man well up in years; and he is an old friend of our family, so if I go with him, how ever will I be able to do anything that's wrong? Should I at any time be guilty of any impropriety, he will be sure to speak to me, and to exhort me. He even knows the prices of things and customs of trade; and as I shall, as a matter of course, consult him in everything, what advantage won't I enjoy? But if you refuse to let me go, I'll wait for a couple of days, and, without breathing a word to any one at home, I'll furtively make my preparations and start, and, when by next year I shall have made my fortune and come back, you'll at length know what stuff I'm made off!"

When he had done speaking, he flew into a huff and went off to sleep.

Mrs. Hsüeh felt impelled, after the arguments she heard him propound, to deliberate with Pao-ch'ai.

"If brother," Pao-ch'ai smilingly rejoined, "were in real earnest about gaining experience in some legitimate concerns, it would be well and good. But though he speaks, now that he is at home, in a plausible manner, the moment he gets abroad, his old mania will break out again, and it will be hard to exercise any check over him. Yet, it isn't worth the while distressing yourself too much about him! If he does actually mend his ways, it will be the happiness of our whole lives. But if he doesn't change, you won't, mother, be able to do anything more; for though, in part, it depends on human exertion, it, in part, depends upon the will of heaven! If you keep on giving way to fears that, with his lack of worldly experience, he can't be fit to go abroad and can't be up to any business, and you lock him up at home this year, why next year he'll be just the same! Such being the case, you'd better, ma,—since his arguments are right and specious enough,—make up your mind to sacrifice from eight hundred to a thousand taels and let him have them for a try. He'll, at all events, have one of his partners to lend him a helping hand, one who won't either think it a nice thing to play any of his tricks upon him. In the second place, there will be, when he's gone, no one to the left of him or to the right of him, to stand by him, and no one upon whom to rely, for when one goes abroad, who cares for any one else? Those who have, eat; and those who haven't starve. When he therefore casts his eyes about him and realises that there's no one to depend upon, he may, upon seeing this, be up to

less mischief than were he to stay at home; but of course, there's no saying."

Mrs. Hsüeh listened to her, and communed within herself for a moment. "What you say is, indeed, right and proper!" she remarked. "And could one, by spending a small sum, make him learn something profitable, it will be well worth!"

They then matured their plans; and nothing further of any note transpired during the rest of the night.

The next day, Mrs. Hsüeh sent a messenger to invite Chang Te-hui to come round. On his arrival, she charged Hsüeh P'an to regale him in the library. Then appearing, in person, outside the window of the covered back passage, she made thousand of appeals to Chang Te-hui to look after her son and take good care of him.

Chang Te-hui assented to her solicitations with profuse assurances, and took his leave after the collation.

"The fourteenth," he went on to explain to Hsüeh P'an. "is a propitious day to start. So, worthy friend, you'd better be quick and pack up your baggage, and hire a mule, for us to begin our long journey as soon as the day dawns on the fourteenth."

Hsüeh P'an was intensely gratified, and he communicated their plans to Mrs. Hsüeh. Mrs. Hsüeh then set to, and worked away, with the assistance of Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling and two old nurses, for several consecutive days, before she got his luggage ready. She fixed upon the husband of Hsüeh P'an's nurse an old man with hoary head, two old servants with ample experience and long services, and two young pages, who acted as Hsüeh P'an's constant attendants, to go with him as his companions, so the party mustered, inclusive of master and followers, six persons in all. Three large carts were hired for the sole purpose of carrying the baggage and requisites; and four mules, suitable for long journeys, were likewise engaged. A tall, dark brown, home-bred mule was selected for Hsüeh P'an's use; but a saddle horse, as well, was provided for him.

After the various preparations had been effected, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai and the other inmates tendered him, night after night, words of advice. But we can well dispense with dilating on this topic. On the arrival of the thirteenth, Hsüeh P'an went and bade goodbye to his maternal uncles. After which, he came and paid

his farewell visit to the members of the Chia household. Chia Chen and the other male relatives unavoidably prepared an entertainment to speed him off. But to these festivities, there is likewise little need to allude with any minuteness.

On the fourteenth, at break of day, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai and the other members of the family accompanied Hsüeh P'an beyond the ceremonial gate. Here his mother and her daughter stood and watched him, their four eyes fixed intently on him, until he got out of sight, when they, at length, retraced their footsteps into the house.

Mrs. Hsüeh had, in coming up to the capital, only brought four or five family domestics and two or three old matrons and waiting-maids with her, so, after the departure on the recent occasion, of those, who followed Hsüeh P'an, no more than one or two men-servants remained in the outer quarters. Mrs. Hsüeh repaired therefore on the very same day into the study, and had the various ornaments, bric-à-brac, curtains and other articles removed into the inner compound and put away. Then bidding the wives of the two male attendants, who had gone with Hsüeh P'an, likewise move their quarters inside, along with the other women, she went on to impress upon Hsiang Ling to put everything carefully away in her own room as well, and to lock the doors; "for," (she said), "you must come at night and sleep with me."

"Since you've got all these people to keep you company, ma," Pao-ch'ai remarked, "wouldn't it be as well to tell sister Ling to come and be my companion? Our garden is besides quite empty and the nights are so long! And as I work away every night, won't it be better for me to have an extra person with me?"

"Quite so!" smiled Mrs. Hsüeh, "I forgot that! I should have told her to go with you; it's but right. It was only the other day that I mentioned to your brother that: 'Wen Hsing too was young, and not fit to attend to everything that turns up, that Ying Erh could not alone do all the waiting, and that it was necessary to purchase another girl for your service.'"

"If we buy one, we won't know what she's really like!" Pao-ch'ai demurred. "If she gives us the slip, the money we may have spent on her will be a mere trifle, so long as she hasn't been up to any pranks! So let's quietly make inquiries, and, when we find one with well-known antecedents, we can purchase her, and, we'll be on the safe side then!"

While speaking, she told Hsiang Ling to collect her bedding and clothes; and desiring an old matron and Ch'in Erh to take them over to the Heng Wu Yüan, Pao-ch'ai returned at last into the garden in company with Hsiang Ling.

"I meant to have proposed to my lady," Hsiang Ling said to Pao-ch'ai, "that, when master left, I should be your companion, miss; but I feared lest her ladyship should, with that suspicious mind of hers, have maintained that I was longing to come into the garden to romp. But who'd have thought it, it was you, after all, who spoke to her about it!"

"I am well aware," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "that you've been inwardly yearning for this garden, and that not for a day or two, but with the little time you can call your own, you would find it no fun, were you even able to run over once in a day, so long as you have to do it in a hurry-scurry! Seize therefore this opportunity of staying, better still, for a year; as I, on my side, will then have an extra companion; and you, on yours, will be able to accomplish your wishes."

"My dear miss!" laughingly observed Hsiang Ling, "do let's make the best of this time, and teach me how to write verses!"

"I say," Pao-ch'ai laughed, "'you no sooner, get the Lung state than you long for the Shu'! I advise you to wait a bit. This is the first day that you spend in here, and you should, first and foremost, go out of the garden by the eastern side gate and look up and salute every one in her respective quarters commencing from our old lady. But you needn't make it a point of telling them that you've moved into the garden. If anyone does allude to the reason why you've shifted your quarters, you can simply explain cursorily that I've brought you in as a companion, and then drop the subject. On your return by and bye into the garden, you can pay a visit to the apartments of each of the young ladies."

Hsiang Ling signified her acquiescence, and was about to start when she saw P'ing Erh rush in with hurried step. Hsiang Ling hastened to ask after her health, and P'ing Erh felt compelled to return her smile, and reciprocate her inquiry.

"I've brought her in to-day," Pao-ch'ai thereupon smilingly said to P'ing Erh, "to make a companion of her. She was just on the point of going to tell your lady about it!"

"What is this that you're saying, Miss?" P'ing Erh rejoined, with a smile. "I really am at a loss what reply to make to you!"

“It’s the right thing!” Pao-ch’ai answered. “’ In a house, there’s the master, and in a temple there’s the chief priest.’ It’s true, it’s no important concern, but something must, in fact, be mentioned, so that those, who sit up on night duty in the garden, may be aware that these two have been added to my rooms, and know when to close the gates and when to wait. When you get back therefore do mention it, so that I mayn’t have to send some one to tell them.”

P’ing Erh promised to carry out her wishes. “As you’re moved in here,” she said to Hsiang Ling, “won’t you go and pay your respects to your neighbours?”

“I had just this very moment,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “told her to go and do so.”

“You needn’t however go to our house,” P’ing Erh remarked, “our Mr. Secundus is laid up at home.”

Hsiang Ling assented and went off, passing first and foremost by dowager lady Chia’s apartments. But without devoting any of our attention to her, we will revert to P’ing Erh.

Seeing Hsiang Ling walk out of the room, she drew Pao-ch’ai near her. “Miss! have you heard our news?” she inquired in a low tone of voice.

“I haven’t heard any news,” Pao-ch’ai responded. “We’ve been daily so busy in getting my brother’s things ready for his voyage abroad, that we know nothing whatever of any of your affairs in here. I haven’t even seen anything of my female cousins these last two days.”

“Our master, Mr. Chia She, has beaten our Mr. Secundus to such a degree that he can’t budge,” P’ing Erh smiled. “But is it likely, miss, that you’ve heard nothing about it?”

“This morning,” Pao-ch’ai said by way of reply, “I heard a vague report on the subject, but I didn’t believe it could be true. I was just about to go and look up your mistress, when you unexpectedly arrived. But why did he beat him again?”

P’ing Erh set her teeth to and gave way to abuse. “It’s all on account of some Chia Yü-ts’un or other; a starved and half-dead boorish bastard, who went yonder quite unexpectedly. It isn’t yet ten years, since we’ve known him, and he has been the cause of ever so much trouble! In the spring of this year, Mr. Chia She saw somewhere or other, I can’t tell where, a lot of antique fans; so, when

on his return home, he noticed that the fine fans stored away in the house, were all of no use, he at once directed servants to go everywhere and hunt up some like those he had seen. Who'd have anticipated it, they came across a reckless creature of retribution, dubbed by common consent the 'stone fool,' who though so poor as to not even have any rice to put to his mouth, happened to have at home twenty antique fans. But these he utterly refused to take out of his main door. Our Mr. Secundus had thus a precious lot of bother to ask ever so many favours of people. But when he got to see the man, he made endless appeals to him before he could get him to invite him to go and sit in his house; when producing the fans, he allowed him to have a short inspection of them. From what our Mr. Secundus says, it would be really difficult to get any the like of them. They're made entirely of spotted black bamboo, and the stags and jadelike clusters of bamboo on them are the genuine pictures, drawn by men of olden times. When he got back, he explained these things to Mr. Chia She, who readily asked him to buy them, and give the man his own price for them. The 'stone fool,' however, refused. 'Were I even to be dying from hunger,' he said, 'or perishing from frostbites, and so much as a thousand taels were offered me for each single fan, I wouldn't part with them.' Mr. Chia She could do nothing, but day after day he abused our Mr. Secundus as a good-for-nothing. Yet he had long ago promised the man five hundred taels, payable cash down in advance, before delivery of the fans, but he would not sell them. 'If you want the fans,' he had answered, 'you must first of all take my life.' Now, miss, do consider what was to be done? But, Yü-ts'un is, as it happens, a man with no regard for divine justice. Well, when he came to hear of it, he at once devised a plan to lay hold of these fans, so fabricating the charge against him of letting a government debt drag on without payment, he had him arrested and brought before him in the Yamên; when he adjudicated that his family property should be converted into money to make up the amount due to the public chest; and, confiscating the fans in question, he set an official value on them and sent them over here. And as for that 'stone fool,' no one now has the faintest idea whether he be dead or alive. Mr. Chia She, however, taunted Mr. Secundus. 'How is it,' he said, 'that other people can manage to get them?' Our master simply rejoined 'that to bring ruin upon a person in such a trivial matter could not be accounted ability.' But, at these words, his father suddenly rushed into a fury, and averred that Mr. Secundus had said things to gag his mouth. This was the main cause. But several minor matters, which I can't even recollect, also occurred during these last few days. So, when all these things accumulated, he set to work and gave him a sound thrashing. He didn't, however, drag him down and strike him with a rattan or cane, but recklessly assaulted him, while he stood before him, with something

or other, which he laid hold of, and broke his face open in two places. We understand that Mrs. Hsüeh has in here some medicine or other for applying on wounds, so do try, miss, and find a ball of it and let me have it!”

Hearing this, Pao-ch’ai speedily directed Ying Erh to go and look for some, and, on discovering two balls of it, she brought them over and handed them to P’ing Erh.

“Such being the case,” Pao-ch’ai said, “do make, on your return, the usual inquiries for me, and I won’t then need to go.”

P’ing Erh turned towards Pao-ch’ai, and expressed her readiness to execute her commission, after which she betook herself home, where we will leave her without further notice.

After Hsiang Ling, for we will take up the thread of our narrative with her, completed her visits to the various inmates, she had her evening meal. Then when Pao-ch’ai and every one else went to dowager lady Chia’s quarters, she came into the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. By this time Tai-yü had got considerably better. Upon hearing that Hsiang Ling had also moved into the garden, she, needless to say, was filled with delight.

“Now, that I’ve come in here,” Hsiang Ling then smiled and said, “do please teach me, at your leisure, how to write verses. It will be a bit of good luck for me if you do.”

“Since you’re anxious to learn how to versify,” Tai-yü answered with a smile, “you’d better acknowledge me as your tutor; for though I’m not a good hand at poetry, yet I know, after all, enough to be able to teach you.”

“Of course you do!” Hsiang Ling laughingly remarked. “I’ll readily treat you as my tutor. But you mustn’t put yourself to any trouble!”

“Is there anything so difficult about this,” Tai-yü pursued, “as to make it necessary to go in for any study? Why, it’s purely and simply a matter of openings, elucidations, embellishments and conclusions. The elucidations and embellishments, which come in the centre, should form two antithetical sentences, the even tones must pair with the uneven. Empty words must correspond with full words; and full words with empty words. In the event of any out-of-the-way lines, it won’t matter if the even and uneven tones, and the

empty and full words do not pair."

"Strange though it may appear," smiled Hsiang Ling, "I often handle books with old poems, and read one or two stanzas, whenever I can steal the time; and some among these I find pair most skilfully, while others don't. I have also heard that the first, third and fifth lines are of no consequence; and that the second, fourth and sixth must be clearly distinguished. But I notice that there are in the poetical works of ancient writers both those which accord with the rules, as well as those whose second, fourth and sixth lines are not in compliance with any rule. Hence it is that my mind has daily been full of doubts. But after the hints you've given me, I really see that all these formulas are of no account, and that the main requirement is originality of diction."

"Yes, that's just the principle that holds good," Tai-yü answered. "But diction is, after all, a last consideration. The first and foremost thing is the choice of proper sentiments; for when the sentiments are correct, there'll even be no need to polish the diction; it's certain to be elegant. This is called versifying without letting the diction affect the sentiments."

"What I admire," Hsiang Ling proceeded with a smile; "are the lines by old Lu Fang;

"The double portière, when not raised, retains the fragrance long. An old inkslab, with a slight hole, collects plenty of ink.

"Their language is so clear that it's charming."

"You must on no account," Tai-yü observed, "read poetry of the kind. It's because you people don't know what verses mean that you, no sooner read any shallow lines like these, than they take your fancy. But when once you get into this sort of style, it's impossible to get out of it. Mark my words! If you are in earnest about learning, I've got here Wang Mo-chieh's complete collection; so you'd better take his one hundred stanzas, written in the pentameter rule of versification, and carefully study them, until you apprehend them thoroughly. Afterwards, look over the one hundred and twenty stanzas of Lao T'u, in the heptameter rule; and next read a hundred or two hundred of the heptameter four-lined stanzas by Li Ch'ing-lieu. When you have, as a first step, digested these three authors, and made them your foundation, you can take T'ao Yuan-ming, Ying, Liu, Hsieh, Yüan, Yü, Pao and other writers and go through them once.

And with those sharp and quick wits of yours, I've no doubt but that you will become a regular poet before a year's time."

"Well, in that case," Hsiang Ling smiled, after listening to her, "bring me the book, my dear miss, so that I may take it along. It will be a good thing if I can manage to read several stanzas at night."

At these words, Tai-yü bade Tzu Chüan fetch Wang Tso-ch'eng's pentameter stanzas. When brought, she handed them to Hsiang Ling. "Only peruse those marked with red circles" she said. "They've all been selected by me. Read each one of them; and should there be any you can't fathom, ask your miss about them. Or when you come across me, I can explain them to you."

Hsiang Ling took the poems and repaired back to the Heng Wu-yüan. And without worrying her mind about anything she approached the lamp and began to con stanza after stanza. Pao-ch'ai pressed her, several consecutive times, to go to bed; but as even rest was far from her thoughts, Pao-ch'ai let her, when she perceived what trouble she was taking over her task, have her own way in the matter.

Tai-yü had one day just finished combing her hair and performing her ablutions, when she espied Hsiang Ling come with smiles playing about her lips, to return her the book and to ask her to let her have T'u's poetical compositions in exchange.

"Of all these, how many stanzas can you recollect?" Tai-yü asked, smiling.

"I've read every one of those marked with a red circle," Hsiang Ling laughingly rejoined.

"Have you caught the ideas of any of them, yes or no?" Tai-yü inquired.

"Yes, I've caught some!" Hsiang Ling smiled. "But whether rightly or not I don't know. Let me tell you."

"You must really," Tai-yü laughingly remarked, "minutely solicit people's opinions if you want to make any progress. But go on and let me hear you."

"From all I can see," Hsiang Ling smiled, "the beauty of poetry lies in certain ideas, which though not quite expressible in words are, nevertheless, found, on

reflection, to be absolutely correct. Some may have the semblance of being totally devoid of sense, but, on second thought, they'll truly be seen to be full of sense and feeling."

"There's a good deal of right in what you say," Tai-yü observed. "But I wonder how you arrived at this conclusion?"

"I notice in that stanza on 'the borderland,' the antithetical couplet:

"In the vast desert reigns but upright mist. In the long river setteth the round sun.

"Consider now how ever can mist be upright? The sun is, of course, round. But the word 'upright' would seem to be devoid of common sense; and 'round' appears far too commonplace a word. But upon throwing the whole passage together, and pondering over it, one fancies having seen the scenery alluded to. Now were any one to suggest that two other characters should be substituted for these two, one would verily be hard pressed to find any other two as suitable. Besides this, there's also the couplet:

"When the sun sets, rivers and lakes are white; When the mist falls, the heavens and earth azure.

"Both 'white' and 'azure', apparently too lack any sense; but reflection will show that these two words are absolutely necessary to bring out thoroughly the aspect of the scenery. And in conning them over, one feels just as if one had an olive, weighing several thousands of catties, in one's mouth, so much relish does one derive from them. But there's this too:

"At the ferry stays the setting sun, O'er the mart hangs the lonesome mist.

"And how much trouble must these words 'stay,' and 'over, have caused the author in their conception! When the boats made fast, in the evening of a certain day of that year in which we came up to the capital, the banks were without a trace of human beings; and there were only just a few trees about; in the distance loomed the houses of several families engaged in preparing their evening meal, and the mist was, in fact, azure like jade, and connected like clouds. So, when I, as it happened, read this couplet last night, it actually seemed to me as if I had come again to that spot!"

But in the course of their colloquy, Pao-yü and T'an Ch'un arrived; and entering

the room, they seated themselves, and lent an ear to her arguments on the verses.

“Seeing that you know so much,” Pao-yü remarked with a smiling face, “you can dispense with reading poetical works, for you’re not far off from proficiency. To hear you expatiate on these two lines, makes it evident to my mind that you’ve even got at their secret meaning.”

“You say,” argued Tai-yü with a significant smile, “that the line:

“‘O’er (the mart) hangs the lonesome mist,’

“is good; but aren’t you yet aware that this is only plagiarised from an ancient writer? But I’ll show you the line I’m telling you of. You’ll find it far plainer and clearer than this.”

While uttering these words, she turned up T’ao Yüan-ming’s,

Dim in the distance lies a country place; Faint in the hamlet-market hangs the mist;

and handed it to Hsiang Ling.

Hsiang Ling perused it, and, nodding her head, she eulogised it. “Really,” she smiled, the word ‘over’ is educed from the two characters implying ‘faint.’

Pao-yü burst out into a loud fit of exultant laughter. “You’ve already got it!” he cried. “There’s no need of explaining anything more to you! Any further explanations will, in lieu of benefiting you, make you unlearn what you’ve learnt. Were you therefore to, at once, set to work, and versify, your lines are bound to be good.”

“Tomorrow,” observed T’an ch’un with a smile; “I’ll stand an extra treat and invite you to join the society.”

“Why make a fool of me, miss?” Hsiang Ling laughingly ejaculated. “It’s merely that mania of mine that made me apply my mind to this subject at all; just for fun and no other reason.”

T’an Ch’un and Tai-yü both smiled. “Who doesn’t go in for these things for fun?” they asked. “Is it likely that we improvise verses in real earnest? Why, if

any one treated our verses as genuine verses, and took them outside this garden, people would have such a hearty laugh at our expense that their very teeth would drop."

"This is again self-violence and self-abasement!" Pao-yü interposed. The other day, I was outside the garden, consulting with the gentlemen about paintings, and, when they came to hear that we had started a poetical society, they begged of me to let them have the rough copies to read. So I wrote out several stanzas, and gave them to them to look over, and who did not praise them with all sincerity? They even copied them and took them to have the blocks cut."

"Are you speaking the truth?" T'an Ch'un and Tai-yü eagerly inquired.

"If I'm telling a lie," Pao-yü laughed, "I'm like that cockatoo on that frame!"

"You verily do foolish things!" Tai-yü and T'an Ch'un exclaimed with one voice, at these words. "But not to mention that they were doggerel lines, had they even been anything like what verses should be, our writings shouldn't have been hawked about outside."

"What's there to fear?" Pao-yü smiled. "Hadn't the writings of women of old been handed outside the limits of the inner chambers, why, there would, at present, be no one with any idea of their very existence."

While he passed this remark, they saw Ju Hua arrive from Hsi Ch'un's quarters to ask Pao-yü to go over; and Pao-yü eventually took his departure.

Hsiang Ling then pressed (Tai-yü) to give her T'u's poems. "Do choose some theme," she also asked Tai-yü and T'an Ch'un, "and let me go and write on it. When I've done, I'll bring it for you to correct."

"Last night," Tai-yü observed, "the moon was so magnificent, that I meant to improvise a stanza on it; but as I haven't done yet, go at once and write one using the fourteenth rhyme, 'han,' (cool). You're at liberty to make use of whatever words you fancy."

Hearing this, Hsiang Ling was simply delighted, and taking the poems, she went back. After considerable exertion, she succeeded in devising a couplet, but so little able was she to tear herself away from the 'T'u' poems, that she perused another couple of stanzas, until she had no inclination for either tea or food, and

she felt in an unsettled mood, try though she did to sit or recline.

“Why,” Pao-ch’ai remonstrated, “do you bring such trouble upon yourself? It’s that P’in Erh, who has led you on to it! But I’ll settle accounts with her! You’ve all along been a thick-headed fool; but now that you’ve burdened yourself with all this, you’ve become a greater fool.”

“Miss,” smiled Hsiang Ling, “don’t confuse me.”

So saying, she set to work and put together a stanza, which she first and foremost handed to Pao-ch’ai to look over.

“This isn’t good!” Pao-ch’ai smilingly said. “This isn’t the way to do it! Don’t fear of losing face, but take it and give it to her to peruse. We’ll see what she says.”

At this suggestion, Hsiang Ling forthwith went with her verses in search of Tai-yü. When Tai-yü came to read them, she found their text to be:

The night grows cool, what time Selene reacheth the mid-heavens. Her radiance pure shineth around with such a spotless sheen. Bards oft for inspiration raise on her their thoughts and eyes. The rustic daren’t see her, so fears he to enhance his grief. Jade mirrors are suspended near the tower of malachite. An icelike plate dangles outside the gem-laden portière. The eve is fine, so why need any silvery candles burn? A clear light shines with dazzling lustre on the painted rails.

“There’s a good deal of spirit in them,” Tai-yü smiled, “but the language is not elegant. It’s because you’ve only read a few poetical works that you labour under restraint. Now put this stanza aside and write another. Pluck up your courage and go and work away.”

After listening to her advice, Hsiang Ling quietly wended her way back, but so much the more (preoccupied) was she in her mind that she did not even enter the house, but remaining under the trees, planted by the side of the pond, she either seated herself on a rock and plunged in a reverie, or squatted down and dug the ground, to the astonishment of all those, who went backwards and forwards. Li wan, Pao-ch’ai, T’an Ch’un, Pao-yü and some others heard about her; and, taking their position some way off on the mound, they watched her, much amused. At one time, they saw her pucker up her eyebrows; and at another smile

to herself.

“That girl must certainly be cracked!” Pao-ch’ai laughed. “Last night she kept on muttering away straight up to the fifth watch, when she at last turned in. But shortly, daylight broke, and I heard her get up and comb her hair, all in a hurry, and rush after P’in Erh. In a while, however, she returned; and, after acting like an idiot the whole day, she managed to put together a stanza. But it wasn’t after all, good, so she’s, of course, now trying to devise another.”

“This indeed shows,” Pao-yü laughingly remarked, “that the earth is spiritual, that man is intelligent, and that heaven does not in the creation of human beings bestow on them natural gifts to no purpose. We’ve been sighing and lamenting that it was a pity that such a one as she, should, really, be so unpolished; but who could ever have anticipated that things would, in the long run, reach the present pass? This is a clear sign that heaven and earth are most equitable!”

“If only,” smiled Pao-ch’ai, at these words, “you could be as painstaking as she is, what a good thing it would be. And would you fail to attain success in anything you might take up?”

Pao-yü made no reply. But realising that Hsiang Ling had crossed over in high spirits to find Tai-yü again, T’an Ch’un laughed and suggested, “Let’s follow her there, and see whether her composition is any good.”

At this proposal, they came in a body to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Here they discovered Tai-yü holding the verses and explaining various things to her.

“What are they like?” they all thereupon inquired of Tai-yü.

“This is naturally a hard job for her!” Tai-yü rejoined. “They’re not yet as good as they should be. This stanza is far too forced; you must write another.”

One and all however expressed a desire to look over the verses. On perusal, they read:

‘Tis not silver, neither water that on the windows shines so cold. Selene, mark! covers, like a jade platter, the clear vault of heaven. What time the fragrance faint of the plum bloom is fain to tinge the air, The dew-bedecked silken willow trees begin to lose their leaves. ‘Tis the remains of powder which methinks besmear the golden steps. Her lustrous rays enshroud like light hoar-frost the

jadelike balustrade. When from my dreams I wake, in the west tower, all human trace is gone. Her slanting orb can yet clearly be seen across the bamboo screen.

“It doesn’t sound like a song on the moon,” Pao-ch’ai smilingly observed. “Yet were, after the word ‘moon’, that of ‘light’ supplied, it would be better; for, just see, if each of these lines treated of the moonlight, they would be all right. But poetry primarily springs from nonsensical language. In a few days longer, you’ll be able to do well.”

Hsiang Ling had flattered herself that this last stanza was perfect, and the criticisms, that fell on her ear, damped her spirits again. She was not however disposed to relax in her endeavours, but felt eager to commune with her own thoughts, so when she perceived the young ladies chatting and laughing, she betook herself all alone to the bamboo-grove at the foot of the steps; where she racked her brain, and ransacked her mind with such intentness that her ears were deaf to everything around her and her eyes blind to everything beyond her task.

“Miss Ling,” T’an Ch’un presently cried, smiling from inside the window, “do have a rest!”

“The character ‘rest;’” Hsiang Ling nervously replied, “comes from lot N.° 15, under ‘shan’, (to correct); so it’s the wrong rhyme.”

This rambling talk made them involuntarily burst out laughing.

“In very fact,” Pao-sh’ai laughed, “she’s under a poetical frenzy, and it’s all P’in Erh who has incited her.”

“The holy man says,” Tai-yü smilingly rejoined, “that ‘one must not be weary of exhorting people’; and if she comes, time and again, to ask me this and that how can I possibly not tell her?”

“Let’s take her to Miss Quarta’s rooms,” Li Wan smiled, “and if we could coax her to look at the painting, and bring her to her senses, it will be well.”

Speaking the while, she actually walked out of the room, and laying hold of her, she brought her through the Lotus Fragrance arbour to the bank of Warm Fragrance. Hsi Ch’un was tired and languid, and was lying on the window, having a midday siesta. The painting was resting against the partition-wall, and was screened with a gauze cover. With one voice, they roused Hsi Ch’un, and

raising the gauze cover to contemplate her work, they saw that three tenths of it had already been accomplished. But their attention was attracted by the representation of several beautiful girls, inserted in the picture, so pointing at Hsiang Ling: “Every one who can write verses is to be put here,” they said, “so be quick and learn.”

But while conversing, they played and laughed for a time, after which, each went her own way.

Hsiang Ling was meanwhile preoccupied about her verses, so, when evening came, she sat facing the lamp absorbed in thought. And the third watch struck before she got to bed. But her eyes were so wide awake, that it was only after the fifth watch had come and gone, that she, at length, felt drowsy and fell fast asleep.

Presently, the day dawned, and Pao-ch’ai woke up; but, when she lent an ear, she discovered (Hsiang Ling) in a sound sleep. “She has racked her brains the whole night long,” she pondered. “I wonder, however, whether she has succeeded in finishing her task. She must be tired now, so I won’t disturb her.”

But in the midst of her cogitations, she heard Hsiang Ling laugh and exclaim in her sleep: “I’ve got it. It cannot be that this stanza too won’t be worth anything.”

“How sad and ridiculous!” Pao-ch’ai soliloquised with a smile. And, calling her by name, she woke her up. “What have you got?” she asked. “With that firmness of purpose of yours, you could even become a spirit! But before you can learn how to write poetry, you’ll be getting some illness.”

Chiding her the while, she combed her hair and washed; and, this done, she repaired, along with her cousins, into dowager lady Chia’s quarters.

Hsiang Ling made, in fact, such desperate efforts to learn all about poetry that her system got quite out of order. But although she did not in the course of the day hit upon anything, she quite casually succeeded in her dreams in devising eight lines; so concluding her toilette and her ablutions, she hastily jotted them down, and betook herself into the Hsin Fang pavilion. Here she saw Li Wan and the whole bevy of young ladies, returning from Madame Wang’s suite of apartments.

Pao-ch’ai was in the act of telling them of the verses composed by Hsiang Ling,

while asleep, and of the nonsense she had been talking, and every one of them was convulsed with laughter. But upon raising their heads, and perceiving that she was approaching, they vied with each other in pressing her to let them see her composition.

But, reader, do you wish to know any further particulars? If you do; read those given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX.

White snow and red plum blossom in the crystal world. The pretty girl, fragrant with powder, cuts some meat and eats it.

Hsiang Ling, we will now proceed, perceived the young ladies engaged in chatting and laughing, and went up to them with a smiling countenance. “Just you look at this stanza!” she said. “If it’s all right, then I’ll continue my studies; but if it isn’t worth any thing, I’ll banish at once from my mind all idea of going in for versification.”

With these words, she handed the verses to Tai-yü and her companions. When they came to look at them, they found this to be their burden:

If thou would’st screen Selene’s beauteous sheen, thou’lt find it hard. Her shadows are by nature full of grace, frigid her form. A row of clothes-stones batter, while she lights a thousand li. When her disc’s half, and the cock crows at the fifth watch, ‘tis cold. Wrapped in my green cloak in autumn, I hear flutes on the stream. While in the tower the red-sleeved maid leans on the rails at night. She feels also constrained to ask of the goddess Ch’ang O: ‘Why it is that she does not let the moon e’er remain round?’

“This stanza is not only good,” they with one voice exclaimed, after perusing it, “but it’s original, it’s charming. It bears out the proverb: ‘In the world, there’s nothing difficult; the only thing hard to get at is a human being with a will.’ We’ll certainly ask you to join our club.”

Hsiang Ling caught this remark; but so little did she credit it that fancying that

they were making fun of her, she still went on to press Tai-yü, Pao-ch’ai and the other girls to give her their opinions. But while engaged in speaking, she spied a number of young waiting-maids, and old matrons come with hurried step. “Several young ladies and ladies have come,” they announced smilingly, “but we don’t know any of them. So your ladyship and you, young ladies, had better come at once and see what relatives they are.”

“What are you driving at?” Li Wan laughed. “You might, after all, state distinctly whose relatives they are.”

“Your ladyship’s two young sisters have come,” the matrons and maids rejoined smiling. “There’s also another young lady, who says she’s miss Hsüeh’s cousin, and a gentleman who pretends to be Mr. Hsüeh P’an’s junior cousin. We are now off to ask Mrs. Hsüeh to meet them. But your ladyship and the young ladies might go in advance and greet them.” As they spoke, they straightway took their leave.

“Has our Hsüeh K’o come along with his sisters?” Pao-ch’ai inquired, with a smile.

“My aunt has probably also come to the capital,” Li Wan laughed. “How is it they’ve all arrived together? This is indeed a strange thing!” Then adjourning in a body into Madame Wang’s drawing rooms, they saw the floor covered with a black mass of people.

Madame Hsing’s sister-in-law was there as well. She had entered the capital with her daughter, Chou Yen, to look up madame Hsing. But lady Feng’s brother, Wang Jen, had, as luck would have it, just been preparing to start for the capital, so the two family connexions set out in company for their common destination. After accomplishing half their journey, they encountered, while their boats were lying at anchor, Li Wan’s widowed sister-in-law, who also was on her way to the metropolis, with her two girls, the elder of whom was Li Wen and the younger Li Ch’i. They all them talked matters over, and, induced by the ties of relationship, the three families prosecuted their voyage together. But subsequently, Hsüeh P’an’s cousin Hsüeh K’o,—whose father had, when on a visit years ago to the capital, engaged his uterine sister to the son of the Han-lin Mei, whose residence was in the metropolis,—came while planning to go and consummate the marriage, to learn of Wang Jen’s departure, so taking his sister with him, he kept in his track till he managed to catch him up. Hence it happened that they all now

arrived in a body to look up their respective relatives. In due course, they exchanged the conventional salutations; and these over, they had a chat.

Dowager lady Chia and madame Wang were both filled with ineffable delight.

“Little wonder is it,” smiled old lady Chia, “if the snuff of the lamp crackled time and again; and if it formed and reformed into a head! It was, indeed, sure to come to this to-day!”

While she conversed on everyday topics, the presents had to be put away; and, as she, at the same time, expressed a wish to keep the new arrivals to partake of some wine and eatables, lady Feng had, needless to say, much extra work added to her ordinary duties.

Li Wan and Pao-ch’ai descanted, of course, with their aunts and cousins on the events that had transpired since their separation. But Tai-yü, though when they first met, continued in cheerful spirits, could not again, when the recollection afterwards flashed through her mind that one and all had their relatives, and that she alone had not a soul to rely upon, avoid withdrawing out of the way, and giving vent to tears.

Pao-yü, however, read her feelings, and he had to do all that lay in his power to exhort her and to console her for a time before she cheered up. Pao-yü then hurried into the I Hung court. Going up to Hsi Jen, She Yüeh and Chi’ng Wen: “Don’t you yet hasten to go and see them?” he smiled. “Who’d ever have fancied that cousin Pao-ch’ai’s own cousin would be what he is? That cousin of hers is so unique in appearance and in deportment. He looks as if he were cousin Pao-ch’ai’s uterine younger brother. But what’s still more odd is, that you should have kept on saying the whole day long that cousin Pao-ch’ai is a very beautiful creature. You should now see her cousin, as well as the two girls of her senior sister-in-law. I couldn’t adequately tell you what they’re like. Good heavens! Good heavens! What subtle splendour and spiritual beauty must you possess to produce beings like them, so superior to other human creatures! How plain it is that I’m like a frog wallowing at the bottom of a well! I’ve throughout every hour of the day said to myself that nowhere could any girls be found to equal those at present in our home; but, as it happens, I haven’t had far to look! Even in our own native sphere, one would appear to eclipse the other! Here I have now managed to add one more stratum to my store of learning! But can it possibly be that outside these few, there can be any more like them?”

As he uttered these sentiments, he smiled to himself. But Hsi Jen noticed how much under the influence of his insane fits he once more was, and she promptly abandoned all idea of going over to pay her respects to the visitors.

Ch'ing Wen and the other girls had already gone and seen them and come back. Putting on a smile, "You'd better," they urged Hsi Jen, "be off at once and have a look at them. Our elder mistress' niece, Miss Pao's cousin, and our senior lady's two sisters resemble a bunch of four leeks so pretty are they!"

But scarcely were these words out of their lips, than they perceived T'an Ch'un too enter the room, beaming with smiles. She came in quest of Pao-yü.

"Our poetical society is in a flourishing way," she remarked.

"It is," smiled Pao-yü. "Here no sooner do we, in the exuberance of our spirits, start a poetical society, than the devils and gods bring through their agency, all these people in our midst! There's only one thing however. Have they, I wonder, ever learnt how to write poetry or not?"

"I just now asked every one of them," T'an Ch'un replied. "Their ideas of themselves are modest, it's true, yet from all I can gather there's not one who can't versify. But should there even be any who can't, there's nothing hard about it. Just look at Hsiang Ling. Her case will show you the truth of what I say."

"Of the whole lot," smiled Ch'ing Wen, "Miss Hsüeh's cousin carries the palm. What do you think about her, Miss Tertia?"

"It's really so!" T'an Ch'un responded. "In my own estimation, even her elder cousin and all this bevy of girls are not fit to hold a candle to her!"

Hsi Jen felt much surprise at what she heard. "This is indeed odd!" she smiled. "Whence could one hunt up any better? We'd like to go and have a peep at her."

"Our venerable senior," T'an Ch'un observed, "was at the very first sight of her so charmed with her that there's nothing she wouldn't do. She has already compelled our Madame Hsing to adopt her as a godchild. Our dear ancestor wishes to bring her up herself; this point was settled a little while back."

Pao-yü went into ecstasies. "Is this a fact?" he eagerly inquired.

“How often have I gone in for yarns?” T’an Ch’un said. “Now that our worthy senior,” continuing, she laughed, “has got this nice granddaughter, she has banished from her mind all thought of a grandson like you!”

“Never mind,” answered Pao-yü smiling. “It’s only right that girls should be more doated upon. But tomorrow is the sixteenth, so we should have a meeting.”

“That girl Lin Tai-yü is no sooner out of bed,” T’an Ch’un remarked, “than cousin Secunda falls ill again. Everything is, in fact, up and down!”

“Our cousin Secunda,” Pao-yü explained, “doesn’t also go in very much for verses, so, what would it matter if she were left out?”

“It would be well to wait a few days,” T’an Ch’un urged, “until the new comers have had time to see enough of us to become intimate. We can then invite them to join us. Won’t this be better? Our senior sister-in-law and cousin Pao have now no mind for poetry. Besides, Hsiang-yün has not arrived. P’in Erh is just over her sickness. The members are not all therefore in a fit state, so wouldn’t it be preferable if we waited until that girl Yün came? The new arrivals will also have a chance of becoming friendly. P’in Erh will likewise recover entirely. Our senior sister-in-law and cousin Pao will have time to compose their minds; and Hsiang Ling to improve in her verses. We shall then be able to convene a full meeting; and won’t it be better? You and I must now go over to our worthy ancestor’s, on the other side, and hear what’s up. But, barring cousin Pao-ch’ai’s cousin,—for we needn’t take her into account, as it’s sure to have been decided that she should live in our home,—if the other three are not to stay here with us, we should entreat our grandmother to let them as well take up their quarters in the garden. And if we succeed in adding a few more to our number, won’t it be more fun for us?”

Pao-yü at these words was so much the more gratified that his very eyebrows distended, and his eyes laughed. “You’ve got your wits about you!” he speedily exclaimed. “My mind is ever so dull! I’ve vainly given way to a fit of joy. But to think of these contingencies was beyond me!”

So saying the two cousins repaired together to their grandmother’s suite of apartments; where, in point of fact, Madame Wang had already gone through the ceremony of recognizing Hsüeh Pao-ch’in as her godchild. Dowager lady Chia’s fascination for her, however, was so much out of the common run that she did

not tell her to take up her quarters in the garden. Of a night, she therefore slept with old lady Chia in the same rooms; while Hsüeh K'o put up in Hsüeh P'an's study.

"Your niece needn't either return home," dowager lady Chia observed to Madame Hsing. "Let her spend a few days in the garden and see the place before she goes."

Madame Hsing's brother and sister-in-law were, indeed, in straitened circumstances at home. So much so that they had, on their present visit to the capital, actually to rely upon such accommodation as Madame Hsing could procure for them and upon such help towards their travelling expenses as she could afford to give them. When she consequently heard her proposal, Madame Hsing was, of course, only too glad to comply with her wishes, and readily she handed Hsing Chou-yen to the charge of lady Feng. But lady Feng, bethinking herself of the number of young ladies already in the garden, of their divergent dispositions and, above all things, of the inconvenience of starting a separate household, deemed it advisable to send her to live along with Ying Ch'un; for in the event, (she thought), of Hsing Chou-yen meeting afterwards with any contrarieties, she herself would be clear of all responsibility, even though Madame Hsing came to hear about them. Deducting, therefore any period, spent by Hsing Chou-yen on a visit home, lady Feng allowed Hsing Chou-yen as well, if she extended her stay in the garden of Broad Vista for any time over a month, an amount equal to that allotted to Ying Ch'un.

Lady Feng weighed with unprejudiced eye Hsing Chou-yen's temperament and deportment. She found in her not the least resemblance to Madame Hsing, or even to her father and mother; but thought her a most genial and love-inspiring girl. This consideration actuated lady Feng (not to deal harshly with her), but to pity her instead for the poverty, in which they were placed at home, and for the hard lot she had to bear, and to treat her with far more regard than she did any of the other young ladies. Madame Hsing, however, did not lavish much attention on her.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the rest had all along been fond of Li Wan for her virtuous and benevolent character. Besides, her continence in remaining a widow at her tender age commanded general esteem. When they therefore now saw her husbandless sister-in-law come to pay her a visit, they would not allow her to go and live outside the mansion. Her sister-in-law was, it

is true, extremely opposed to the proposal, but as dowager lady Chia was firm in her determination, she had no other course but to settle down, along with Li Wen and Li Ch'i, in the Tao Hsiang village.

They had by this time assigned quarters to all the new comers, when, who would have thought it, Shih Ting, Marquis of Chung Ching, was once again appointed to a high office in another province, and he had shortly to take his family and proceed to his post. But so little could old lady Chia brook the separation from Hsiang-yün that she kept her behind and received her in her own home. Her original idea was to have asked lady Feng to have separate rooms arranged for her, but Shih Hsiang-yün was so obstinate in her refusal, her sole wish being to put up with Pao-ch'ai, that the idea had, in consequence, to be abandoned.

At this period, the garden of Broad Vista was again much more full of life than it had ever been before. Li Wan was the chief inmate. The rest consisted of Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü, Hsiang-yün, Li Wen, Li Ch'i, Pao Ch'in and Hsing Chou-yen. In addition to these, there were lady Feng and Pao-yü, so that they mustered thirteen in all. As regards age, irrespective of Li Wan, who was by far the eldest, and lady Feng, who came next, the other inmates did not exceed fourteen, sixteen or seventeen. But the majority of them had come into the world in the same year, though in different months, so they themselves could not remember distinctly who was senior, and who junior. Even dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the matrons and maids in the household were unable to tell the differences between them with any accuracy, given as they were to the simple observance of addressing themselves promiscuously and quite at random by the four words representing 'female cousin' and 'male cousin.'

Hsiang Ling was gratifying her wishes to her heart's content and devoting her mind exclusively to the composition of verses, not presuming however to make herself too much of a nuisance to Pao-ch'ai, when, by a lucky coincidence, Shih Hsiang-yün came on the scene. But how was it possible for one so loquacious as Hsiang-yün to avoid the subject of verses, when Hsiang Ling repeatedly begged her for explanations? This inspirited her so much the more, that not a day went by, yea not a single night, on which she did not start some loud argument and lengthy discussion.

"You really," Pao-ch'ai felt impelled to laugh, "kick up such a din, that it's quite unbearable! Fancy a girl doing nothing else than turning poetry into a legitimate

thing for raising an argument! Why, were some literary persons to hear you, they would, instead of praising you, have a laugh at your expense, and say that you don't mind your own business. We hadn't yet got rid of Hsiang Ling with all her rubbish, and here we have a chatterbox like you thrown on us! But what is it that that mouth of yours keeps on jabbering? What about the bathos of Tu Kung-pu; and the unadorned refinement of Wei Su-chou? What also about Wen Pa-ch'a's elegant diction; and Li I-shan's abstruseness? A pack of silly fools that you are! Do you in any way behave like girls should?"

These sneers evoked laughter from both Hsiang Ling and Hsiang-yün. But in the course of their conversation, they perceived Pao-ch'in drop in, with a waterproof wrapper thrown over her, so dazzling with its gold and purplish colours, that they were at a loss to make out what sort of article it could be.

"Where did you get this?" Pao-ch'ai eagerly inquired.

"It was snowing," Pao-ch'in smilingly replied, "so her venerable ladyship turned up this piece of clothing and gave it to me."

Hsiang Ling drew near and passed it under inspection. "No wonder," she exclaimed, "it looks so handsome! It's verily woven with peacock's feathers."

"What about peacock's feathers?" Hsiang-yün laughed. "It's made of the feathers plucked from the heads of wild ducks. This is a clear sign that our worthy ancestor is fond of you, for with all her love for Pao-yü, she hasn't given it to him to wear."

"Truly does the proverb say: 'that every human being has his respective lot.'" Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Nothing ever was further from my thoughts than that she would, at this juncture, drop on the scene! Come she may, but here she also gets our dear ancestor to lavish such love on her!"

"Unless you stay with our worthy senior," Hsiang-yün said, "do come into the garden. You may romp and laugh and eat and drink as much as you like in these two places. But when you get over to Madame Hsing's rooms, talk and joke with her, if she be at home, to your heart's content; it won't matter if you tarry ever so long. But should she not be in, don't put your foot inside; for the inmates are many in those rooms and their hearts are evil. All they're up to is to do us harm."

These words much amused Pao-ch'ai, Pao-ch'in, Hsiang-Ling, Ying Erh and the

others present.

“Were one to say,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “that you’re heartless, (it wouldn’t do); for you’ve got a heart. But despite your having a heart, your tongue is, in fact, a little too outspoken! You should really to-day acknowledge this Ch’in Erh of ours as your own sister!”

“This article of clothing,” Hsiang-yün laughed, casting another glance at Pao-ch’in, “is only meet for her to wear. It wouldn’t verily look well on any one else.”

Saying this, she espied Hu Po enter the room. “Our old mistress,” she put in smiling, “bade me tell you, Miss Pao-ch’ai, not to keep too strict a check over Miss Ch’in, for she’s yet young; that you should let her do as she pleases, and that whatever she wants you should ask for, and not be afraid.”

Pao-ch’ai hastily jumped to her feet and signified her obedience. Pushing Pao-ch’in, she laughed. “Even you couldn’t tell whence this piece of good fortune hails from,” she said. “Be off now; for mind, we might hurt your feelings. I can never believe myself so inferior to you!”

As she spoke, Pao-yü and Tai-yü walked in. But as Pao-ch’ai continued to indulge in raillery to herself, “Cousin Pao,” Hsiang-yün smilingly remonstrated, “you may, it’s true, be jesting, but what if there were any one to entertain such ideas in real earnest?”

“If any one took things in earnest,” Hu Po interposed laughing, “why, she’d give offence to no one else but to him.” Pointing, as she uttered this remark, at Pao-yü.

“He’s not that sort of person!” Pao-ch’ai and Hsiang-yün simultaneously ventured, with a significant smile.

“If it isn’t he,” Hu Po proceeded still laughing, “it’s she.” Turning again her finger towards Tai-yü.

Hsiang-yün expressed not a word by way of rejoinder.

“That’s still less likely,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “for my cousin is like her own sister; and she’s far fonder of her than of me. How could she therefore take offence? Do

you credit that nonsensical trash uttered by Yün-erh! Why what good ever comes out of that mouth of hers?”

Pao-yü was ever well aware that Tai-yü was gifted with a somewhat mean disposition. He had not however as yet come to learn anything of what had recently transpired between Tai-yü and Pao-ch’ai. He was therefore just giving way to fears lest his grandmother’s fondness for Pao-ch’in should be the cause of her feeling dejected. But when he now heard the remarks passed by Hsiang-yün, and the rejoinders made, on the other hand, by Pao-ch’ai, and, when he noticed how different Tai-yü‘s voice and manner were from former occasions, and how they actually bore out Pao-ch’ai’s insinuation, he was at a great loss how to solve the mystery. “These two,” he consequently pondered, “were never like this before! From all I can now see, they’re, really, a hundred times far more friendly than any others are!” But presently he also observed Lin Tai-yü rush after Pao-ch’in, and call out ‘Sister,’ and, without even making any allusion to her name or any mention to her surname, treat her in every respect, just as if she were her own sister.

This Pao-ch’in was young and warm-hearted. She was naturally besides of an intelligent disposition. She had, from her very youth up, learnt how to read and how to write. After a stay, on the present occasion, of a couple of days in the Chia mansion, she became acquainted with nearly every inmate. And as she saw that the whole bevy of young ladies were not of a haughty nature, and that they kept on friendly terms with her own cousin, she did not feel disposed to treat them with any discourtesy. But she had likewise found out for herself that Lin Tai-yü was the best among the whole lot, so she started with Tai-yü, more than with any one else, a friendship of unusual fervour. This did not escape Pao-yü‘s notice; but all he could do was to secretly give way to amazement.

Shortly, however, Pao-ch’ai and her cousin repaired to Mrs. Hsüeh’s quarters. Hsiang-yün then betook herself to dowager lady Chia’s apartments, while Lin Tai-yü returned to her room and lay down to rest.

Pao-yü thereupon came to look up Tai-yü.

“Albeit I’ve read the ‘Record of the Western Side-room,’” he smiled, “and understood a few passages of it, yet when I quoted some in order to make you laugh, you flew into a huff! But I now remember that there is, indeed, a passage, which is not intelligible to me; so let me quote it for you to explain it for me!”

Hearing this, Tai-yü immediately concluded that his words harboured some secret meaning, so putting on a smile, “Recite it and let me hear it,” she said.

“In the ‘Confusion’ chapter,” Pao-yü laughingly began, “there’s a line couched in most beautiful language. It’s this: ‘What time did Meng Kuang receive Liang Hung’s candlestick?’ (When did you and Pao-ch’ai get to be such friends?) These five characters simply bear on a stock story; but to the credit of the writer be it, the question contained in the three empty words representing, ‘What time’ is set so charmingly! When did she receive it? Do tell me!”

At this inquiry, Tai-yü too could not help laughing. “The question was originally nicely put,” she felt urged to rejoin with a laugh. “But though the writer sets it gracefully, you ask it likewise with equal grace!”

“At one time,” Pao-yü. observed, “all you knew was to suspect that I (was in love with Pao-ch’ai); and have you now no faults to find?”

“Who ever could have imagined her such a really nice girl!” Tai-yü smiled. “I’ve all along thought her full of guile!” And seizing the occasion, she told Pao-yü with full particulars how she had, in the game of forfeits, made an improper quotation, and what advice Pao-ch’ai had given her on the subject; how she had even sent her some birds’ nests, and what they had said in the course of the chat they had had during her illness.

Pao-yü then at length came to see why it was that such a warm friendship had sprung up between them. “To tell you the truth,” he consequently remarked smilingly, “I was just wondering when Meng Kuang had received Liang Hung’s candlestick; and, lo, you, indeed, got it, when a mere child and through some reckless talk, (and your friendship was sealed).”

As the conversation again turned on Pao-ch’in, Tai-yü recalled to mind that she had no sister, and she could not help melting once more into tears.

Pao-yü hastened to reason with her. “This is again bringing trouble upon yourself!” he argued. “Just see how much thinner you are this year than you were last; and don’t you yet look after your health? You deliberately worry yourself every day of your life. And when you’ve had a good cry, you feel at last that you’ve acquitted yourself of the duties of the day.”

“Of late,” Tai-yü observed, drying her tears, “I feel sore at heart. But my tears

are scantier by far than they were in years gone by. With all the grief and anguish, which gnaw my heart, my tears won't fall plentifully."

"This is because weeping has become a habit with you," Pao-yü added. "But though you fancy to yourself that it is so, how can your tears have become scantier than they were?"

While arguing with her, he perceived a young waiting-maid, attached to his room, bring him a red felt wrapper. "Our senior mistress, lady Chia Chu," she went on, "has just sent a servant to say that, as it snows, arrangements should be made for inviting people tomorrow to write verses."

But hardly was this message delivered, than they saw Li Wan's maid enter, and invite Tai-yü to go over. Pao-yü then proposed to Tai-yü to accompany him, and together they came to the Tao Hsiang village. Tai-yü changed her shoes for a pair of low shoes made of red scented sheep skin, ornamented with gold, and hollowed clouds. She put on a deep red crape cloak, lined with white fox fur; girdled herself with a lapis-lazuli coloured sash, decorated with bright green double rings and four sceptres; and covered her head with a hat suitable for rainy weather. After which, the two cousins trudged in the snow, and repaired to this side of the mansion. Here they discovered the young ladies assembled, dressed all alike in deep red felt or camlet capes, with the exception of Li Wan, who was clad in a woollen jacket, buttoning in the middle.

Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai wore a pinkish-purple twilled pelisse, lined with foreign 'pa' fur, worked with threads from abroad, and ornamented with double embroidery. Hsing Chou-yen was still attired in an old costume, she ordinarily used at home, without any garment for protection against the rain. Shortly, Shih Hsiang-yün arrived. She wore the long pelisse, given her by dowager lady Chia, which gave warmth both from the inside and outside, as the top consisted of martin-head fur, and the lining of the long-haired coat of the dark grey squirrel. On her head, she had a deep red woollen hood, made *á la* Chao Chün, with designs of clouds scooped out on it. This was lined with gosling-yellow, gold-streaked silk. Round her neck, she had a collar of sable fur.

"Just see here!" Tai-yü was the first to shout with a laugh. "Here comes Sun Hsing-che the 'monkey-walker!' Lo, like him, she holds a snow cloak, and purposely puts on the air of a young bewitching ape!"

“Look here, all of you!” Hsiang-yün laughed. “See what I wear inside!”

So saying, she threw off her cloak. This enabled them to notice that she wore underneath a half-new garment with three different coloured borders on the collar and cuffs, consisting of a short pelisse of russet material lined with ermine and ornamented with dragons embroidered in variegated silks whose coils were worked with golden threads. The lapel was narrow. The sleeves were short. The folds buttoned on the side. Under this, she had a very short light-red brocaded satin bodkin, lined with fur from foxes’ ribs. Round her waist was lightly attached a many-hued palace sash, with butterfly knots and long tassels. On her feet, she too wore a pair of low shoes made of deer leather. Her waist looked more than ever like that of a wasp, her back like that of the gibbon. Her bearing resembled that of a crane, her figure that of a mantis.

“Her weak point,” they laughed unanimously, “is to get herself up to look like a young masher. But she does, there’s no denying, cut a much handsomer figure like this, than when she’s dressed up like a girl!”

“Lose no time,” Hsiang-yün smiled, “in deliberating about writing verses, for I’d like to hear who is to stand treat.”

“According to my idea,” Li Wan chimed in, “I think that as the legitimate day, which was yesterday, has gone by, it would be too long to wait for another proper date. As luck would have it, it’s snowing again to-day, so won’t it be well to raise contributions among ourselves and have a meeting? We’ll thus be able to give the visitors a greeting; and to get an opportunity of writing a few verses. But what are your views on the subject?”

“This proposal is excellent!” Pao-yü was the first to exclaim. “The only thing is that it’s too late to-day; and if it clears up by tomorrow, there will be really no fun.”

“It isn’t likely,” cried out the party with one voice, “that this snowy weather will clear up. But even supposing it does, the snow which will fall during this night will be sufficient for our enjoyment.”

“This place of mine is nice enough, it’s true,” Li Wan added, “yet it isn’t up to the Lu Hsüeh Pavilion. I’ve already therefore despatched workmen to raise earthen couches, so that we should all be able to sit round the fire and compose our verses. Our venerable senior, I fancy, is not sure about caring to join us.

Besides, this is only a small amusement between ourselves so if we just let that hussy Feng know something about it, it will be quite enough. A tael from each of you will be ample, but send your money to me here! As regards Hsiang Ling, Pao-ch'in, Li Wen, Li Ch'i and Chou-yen, the five of them, we needn't count them. Neither need we include the two girls of our number, who are ill; nor take into account the four girls who've asked for leave. If you will let me have your four shares, I'll undertake to see that five or six taels be made to suffice."

Pao-ch'ai and the others without exception signified their acquiescence. They consequently proceeded to propose the themes and to fix upon the rhymes.

"I've long ago," smiled Li Wan, "settled them in my own mind, so tomorrow at the proper time you'll really know all about them."

At the conclusion of this remark, they indulged in another chat on irrelevant topics; and this over, they came into old lady Chia's quarters.

Nothing of any note transpired during the course of that day. At an early hour on the morrow, Pao-yü—for he had been looking forward with such keen expectation to the coming event that he had found it impossible to have any sleep during the night,—jumped out of bed with the first blush of dawn. Upon raising his curtain and looking out, he observed that, albeit the doors and windows were as yet closed, a bright light shone on the lattice sufficient to dazzle the eyes, and his mind began at once to entertain misgivings, and to feel regrets, in the assurance that the weather had turned out fine, and that the sun had already risen. In a hurry, he simultaneously sprung to his feet, and flung the window-frame open, then casting a glance outside, from within the glass casement, he realised that it was not the reflection of the sun, but that of the snow, which had fallen throughout the night to the depth of over a foot, and that the heavens were still covered as if with twisted cotton and unravelled floss. Pao-yü got, by this time, into an unusual state of exhilaration. Hastily calling up the servants, and completing his ablutions, he robed himself in an egg-plant-coloured camlet, fox-fur lined pelisse; donned a short-sleeved falconry surtout ornamented with water dragons; tied a sash round his waist; threw over his shoulders a fine bamboo waterproof; covered his head with a golden rattan rain-hat; put on a pair of 'sha t'ang' wood clogs, and rushed out with precipitate step towards the direction of the Lu Hsüeh Pavilion.

As soon as he sallied out of the gate of the courtyard, he gazed on all four

quarters. No trace whatever of any other colour (but white) struck his eye. In the distance stood the green fir-trees and the kingfisherlike bamboos. They too looked, however, as if they were placed in a glass bowl.

Forthwith he wended his way down the slope and trudged along the foot of the hill. But the moment he turned the bend, he felt a whiff of cold fragrance come wafted into his nostrils. Turning his head, he espied ten and more red plum trees, over at Miao Yü‘s in the Lung Ts’ui monastery. They were red like very rouge. And, reflecting the white colour of the snow, they showed off their beauty to such an extraordinary degree as to present a most pleasing sight.

Pao-yü quickly stood still, and gazed, with all intentness, at the landscape for a time. But just as he was proceeding on his way, he caught sight of some one on the “Wasp waist” wooden bridge, advancing in his direction, with an umbrella in hand. It was the servant, despatched by Li Wan, to request lady Peng to go over.

On his arrival in the Lu Hsüeh pavilion, Pao-yü found the maids and matrons engaged in sweeping away the snow and opening a passage. This Lu Hsüeh (Water-rush snow) pavilion was, we might explain, situated on a side hill, in the vicinity of a stream and spanned the rapids formed by it. The whole place consisted of several thatched roofs, mud walls, side fences, bamboo lattice windows and pushing windows, out of which fishing-lines could be conveniently dropped. On all four sides flourished one mass of reeds, which concealed the single path out of the pavilion. Turning and twisting, he penetrated on his way through the growth of reeds until he reached the spot where stretched the bamboo bridge leading to the Lotus Fragrance Arbour.

The moment the maids and matrons saw him approach with his waterproof-wrapper thrown over his person and his rain-hat on his head, they with one voice laughed, “We were just remarking that what was lacking was a fisherman, and lo, now we’ve got everything that was wanted! The young ladies are coming after their breakfast; you’re in too impatient a mood!”

At these words, Pao-yü had no help but to retrace his footsteps. As soon as he reached the Hsin Tang pavilion, he perceived T’an Ch’un, issuing from the Ch’iu Shuang Study, wrapped in a deep red woollen waterproof, and a ‘Kuan Yin’ hood on her head, supporting herself on the arm of a young maid. Behind her, followed a married woman, holding a glazed umbrella made of green satin.

Pao-yü knew very well that she was on her way to his grandmother's, so speedily halting by the side of the pavilion, he waited for her to come up. The two cousins then left the garden together, and betook themselves to the front part of the mansion. Pao-ch'in was at the time in the inner apartments, combing her hair, washing her hands and face and changing her apparel. Shortly, the whole number of girls arrived. "I feel peckish!" Pao-yü shouted; and again and again he tried to hurry the meal. It was with great impatience that he waited until the eatables could be laid on the table.

One of the dishes consisted of kid, boiled in cow's milk. "This is medicine for us, who are advanced in years," old lady Chia observed. "They're things that haven't seen the light! The pity is that you young people can't have any. There's some fresh venison to-day as an extra course, so you'd better wait and eat some of that!"

One and all expressed their readiness to wait. Pao-yü however could not delay having something to eat. Seizing a cup of tea, he soaked a bowlful of rice, to which he added some meat from a pheasant's leg, and gobbled it down in a scramble.

"I'm well aware," dowager lady Chia said, "that as you're up to something again to-day, you people have no mind even for your meal. Let them keep," she therefore cried, "that venison for their evening repast!"

"What an idea!" lady Feng promptly put in. "We'll have enough with what remains of it."

Shih Hsiang-yün thereupon consulted with Pao-yü. "As there's fresh venison," she said, "wouldn't it be nice to ask for a haunch and take it into the garden and prepare it ourselves? We'll thus be able to sate our hunger, and have some fun as well."

At this proposal, Pao-yü actually asked lady Feng to let them have a haunch, and he bade a matron carry it into the garden.

Presently, they all got up from table. After a time, they entered the garden and came in a body to the Lu Hsüeh pavilion to hear Li Wan give out the themes, and fix upon the rhymes. But Hsiang-yün and Pao-yü were the only two of whom nothing was seen.

“Those two,” Tai-yü observed, “can’t get together! The moment they meet, how much trouble doesn’t arise! They must surely have now gone to hatch their plans over that haunch of venison.”

These words were still on her lips when she saw ‘sister-in-law’ Li coming also to see what the noise was all about. “How is it,” she then inquired of Li Wan, “that that young fellow, with the jade, and that girl, with the golden unicorn round her neck, both of whom are so cleanly and tidy, and have besides ample to eat, are over there conferring about eating raw meat? There they are chatting, saying this and saying that; but I can’t see how meat can be eaten raw!”

This remark much amused the party. “How dreadful!” they exclaimed, “Be quick and bring them both here!”

“All this fuss,” Tay-yü smiled, “is the work of that girl Yün. I’m not far off again in my surmises.”

Li Wan went out with precipitate step in search of the cousins. “If you two are bent upon eating raw meat,” she cried, “I’ll send you over to our old senior’s; you can do so there. What will I care then if you have a whole deer raw and make yourselves ill over it? It won’t be any business of mine. But it’s snowing hard and it’s bitterly cold, so be quick and go and write some verses for me and be off!”

“We’re doing nothing of the kind,” Pao-yü hastily rejoined. “We’re going to eat some roasted meat.”

“Well, that won’t matter!” Li Wan observed. And seeing the old matrons bring an iron stove, prongs and a gridiron of iron wire, “Mind you don’t cut your hands,” Li Wan resumed, “for we won’t have any crying!”

This remark concluded, she walked in.

Lady Feng had sent P’ing Erh from her quarters to announce that she was unable to come, as the issue of the customary annual money gave her just at present, plenty to keep her busy.

Hsiang-yün caught sight of P’ing Erh and would not let her go on her errand. But P’ing Erh too was fond of amusement, and had ever followed lady Feng everywhere she went, so, when she perceived what fun was to be got, and how

merrily they joked and laughed, she felt impelled to take off her bracelets (and to join them). The trio then pressed round the fire; and P'ing Erh wanted to be the first to roast three pieces of venison to regale themselves with.

On the other side, Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü had, even in ordinary times, seen enough of occasions like the present. They did not therefore think it anything out of the way; but Pao-ch'in and the other visitors, inclusive of 'sister-in-law' Li, were filled with intense wonder.

T'an Ch'un had, with the help of Li Wan, and her companions, succeeded by this time in choosing the subjects and rhymes. "Just smell that sweet fragrance," T'an Ch'un remarked. "One can smell it even here! I'm also going to taste some."

So speaking, she too went to look them up. But Li Wan likewise followed her out. "The guests are all assembled," she observed. "Haven't you people had enough as yet?"

While Hsiang-yün munched what she had in her month, she replied to her question. "Whenever," she said, "I eat this sort of thing, I feel a craving for wine. It's only after I've had some that I shall be able to rhyme. Were it not for this venison, I would to-day have positively been quite unfit for any poetry." As she spoke, she discerned Pao-ch'in, standing and laughing opposite to her, in her duck-down garment.

"You idiot," Hsiang-yün laughingly cried, "come and have a mouthful to taste."

"It's too filthy!" Pao-ch'in replied smiling.

"You go and try it." Pao-ch'ai added with a laugh. "It's capital! Your cousin Lin is so very weak that she couldn't digest it, if she had any. Otherwise she too is very fond of this."

Upon hearing this, Pao-ch'in readily crossed over and put a piece in her mouth; and so good did she find it that she likewise started eating some of it.

In a little time, however, lady Feng sent a young maid to call P'ing Erh.

"Miss Shih," P'ing Erh explained, "won't let me go. So just return ahead of me."

The maid thereupon took her leave; but shortly after they saw lady Feng arrive; she too with a wrapper over her shoulders.

“You’re having,” she smiled; “such dainties to eat, and don’t you tell me?”

Saying this, she also drew near and began to eat.

“Where has this crowd of beggars turned up from?” Tai-yü put in with a laugh. “But never mind, never mind! Here’s the Lu Hsüeh pavilion come in for this calamity to-day, and, as it happens, it’s that chit Yün by whom it has been polluted! But I’ll have a good cry for the Lu Hsüeh pavilion.”

Hsiang-yün gave an ironical smile. “What do you know?” she exclaimed. “A genuine man of letters is naturally refined. But as for the whole lot of you, your poor and lofty notions are all a sham! You are most loathsome! We may now be frowzy and smelly, as we munch away lustily with our voracious appetites, but by and bye we’ll prove as refined as scholars, as if we had cultured minds and polished tongues.”

“If by and bye,” Pao-ch’ai laughingly interposed, “the verses you compose are not worth anything, I’ll tug out that meat you’ve eaten, and take some of these snow-buried weeds and stuff you up with. I’ll thus put an end to this evil fortune!”

While bandying words, they finished eating. For a time, they busied themselves with washing their hands. But when P’ing Erh came to put on her bracelets, she found one missing. She looked in a confused manner, at one time to the left, at another to the right; now in front of her, and then behind her for ever so long, but not a single vestige of it was visible. One and all were therefore filled with utter astonishment.

“I know where this bracelet has gone to;” lady Feng suggested smilingly. “But just you all go and attend to your poetry. We too can well dispense with searching for it, and repair to the front. Before three days are out, I’ll wager that it turns up. What verses are you writing to-day?” continuing she went on to inquire. “Our worthy senior says that the end of the year is again nigh at hand, and that in the first moon some more conundrums will have to be devised to be affixed on lanterns, for the recreation of the whole family.”

“Of course we’ll have to write a few,” they laughingly rejoined, upon hearing her

remarks. “We forgot all about it. Let’s hurry up now, and compose a few fine ones, so as to have them ready to enjoy some good fun in the first moon.”

Speaking the while, they came in a body into the room with the earthen couches, where they found the cups, dishes and eatables already laid out in readiness. On the walls had been put up the themes, metre, and specimen verses. Pao-yü and Hsiang-yün hastened to examine what was written. They saw that they had to take for a theme something on the present scenery and indite a stanza with antithetical pentameter lines; that the word ‘hsiao,’ second (in the book of metre), had been fixed upon as a rhyme; but that there was, below that, no mention, as yet, made of any precedence.

“I can’t write verses very well,” Li Wan pleaded, “so all I’ll do will be to devise three lines, and the one, who’ll finish the task first, we’ll have afterwards to pair them.”

“We should, after all,” Pao-ch’ai urged, “make some distinction with regard to order.”

But, reader, if you entertain any desire to know the sequel, peruse the particulars recorded in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER L.

In the Lu Hsüeh pavilion, they vie with each other in pairing verses on the scenery. In the Nuan Hsiang village, they compose, in beautiful style, riddles for the spring lanterns.

But to continue. “We should, after all,” Pao-ch’ai suggested, “make some distinction as to order. Let me write out what’s needful.”

After uttering this proposal, she urged every one to draw lots and determine the precedence. The first one to draw was Li Wan. After her, a list of the respective names was made in the order in which they came out.

“Well, in that case,” lady Feng rejoined, “I’ll also give a top line.”

The whole party laughed in chorus. “It will be ever so much better like this,” they said.

Pao-ch’ai supplied above ‘the old labourer of Tao Hsiang’ the word ‘Feng,’ whereupon Li Wan went on to explain the theme to her.

“You musn’t poke fun at me!” lady Feng smiled, after considerable reflection. “I’ve only managed to get a coarse line. It consists of five words. As for the rest, I have no idea how to manage them.”

“The coarser the language, the better it is,” one and all laughed. “Out with it! You can then go and attend to your legitimate business!”

“I fancy,” lady Feng observed, “that when it snows there’s bound to be northerly wind, for last night I heard the wind blow from the north the whole night long. I’ve got a line, it’s:

“‘The whole night long the northern wind was high;’

“but whether it will do or not, I am not going to worry my mind about it.”

One and all, upon hearing this, exchanged looks. “This line is, it’s true, coarse,” they smiled, “and gives no insight into what comes below, but it’s just the kind of opening that would be used by such as understand versification. It’s not only good, but it will afford to those, who come after you, inexhaustible scope for writing. In fact, this line will take the lead, so ‘old labourer of Tao Hsiang’ be quick and indite some more to tag on below.”

Lady Feng, ‘sister-in-law’ Li, and P’ing Erh had then another couple of glasses, after which each went her own way. During this while Li Wan wrote down:

The whole night long the northern wind was high;

and then she herself subjoined the antithetical couplet:

The door I ope, and lo the flakes of snow are still toss’d by the wind, And drop into the slush. Oh, what a pity they’re so purely white!

Hsiang Ling recited:

All o’er the ground is spread, alas, this bright, refulgent gem; But with an aim; for it is meant dry herbage to revive.

T’an Ch’un said:

Without design the dying sprouts of grain it nutrifies. But in the villages the price of mellow wine doth rise.

Li Ch’i added:

In a good year, grain in the house is plentiful. The bulrush moves and the ash issues from the tube.

Li Wen continued:

What time spring comes the handle of the Dipper turns. The bleaky hills have long ago their verdure lost.

Chou-yen proceeded:

On a frost-covered stream, no tide can ever rise. Easy the snow hangs on the sparse-leaved willow twigs.

Hsiang-yün pursued:

Hard ‘tis for snow to pile on broken plantain leaves. The coal, musk-scented, burns in the precious tripod.

Pao-ch’in recited:

Th’ embroidered sleeve enwraps the golden sable in its folds. The snow transcends the mirror by the window in lustre.

Pao-yü suggested:

The fragrant pepper clings unto the wall. The side wind still in whistling gusts doth blow.

Tai-yü added:

A quiet dream becomes a cheerless thing. Where is the fife with plum bloom

painted on?

Pao-ch’ai continued:

In whose household is there a flute made of green jade? The fish fears lest the earth from its axis might drop.

“I’ll go and see that the wine is warm for you people,” Li Wan smiled.

But when Pao-ch’ai told Pao-ch’in to connect some lines, she caught sight of Hsiang-yün rise to her feet and put in:

What time the dragon wages war, the clouds dispel. Back to the wild shore turns the man with single scull.

Pao-ch’in thereupon again appended the couplet:

The old man hums his lines, and with his whip he points at the ‘Pa’ bridge. Fur coats are, out of pity, on the troops at the frontiers bestowed.

But would Hsiang-yün allow any one to have a say? The others could not besides come up to her in quickness of wits so that, while their eyes were fixed on her, she with eyebrows uplifted and figure outstretched proceeded to say:

More cotton coats confer, for bear in memory th’ imperial serfs! The rugged barbarous lands are (on account of snow) with dangers fraught.

Pao-ch’ai praised the verses again and again, and next contributed the distich:

The twigs and branches live in fear of being tossed about. With what whiteness and feath’ry step the flakes of snow descend!

Tai-yü eagerly subjoined the lines:

The snow as nimbly falls as moves the waist of the ‘Sui’ man when brandishing the sword. The tender leaves of tea, so acrid to the taste, have just been newly brewed and tried.

As she recited this couplet, she gave Pao-yü a shove and urged him to go on. Pao-yü was, at the moment, enjoying the intense pleasure of watching the three girls Pao-ch’ai, Pao-ch’in and Tai-yü make a joint onslaught on Hsiang-yün, so that he had of course not given his mind to tagging any antithetical verses. But when he now felt Tai-yü push him he at length chimed in with:

The fir is the sole tree which is decreed for ever to subsist. The wild goose follows in the mud the prints and traces of its steps.

Pao-ch’in took up the clue, adding:

In the forest, the axe of the woodcutter may betimes be heard. With (snow) covered contours, a thousand peaks their heads jut in the air.

Hsiang-yün with alacrity annexed the verses:

The whole way tortuous winds like a coiled snake. The flowers have felt the cold and ceased to bud.

Pao-ch’ai and her companions again with one voice eulogised their fine diction.

T’an Ch’un then continued:

Could e’er the beauteous snow dread the nipping of frost? In the deep court the shivering birds are startled by its fall.

Hsiang-yün happened to be feeling thirsty and was hurriedly swallowing a cup of tea, when her turn was at once snatched by Chou-yen, who gave out the lines,

On the bare mountain wails the old man Hsiao. The snow covers the steps, both high and low.

Hsiang-yün immediately put away the tea-cup and added:

On the pond’s surface, it allows itself to float. At the first blush of dawn with

effulgence it shines.

Tai-yü recited with alacrity the couplet:

In confused flakes, it ceaseless falls the whole night long. Troth one forgets that it implies three feet of cold.

Hsiang-yün hastened to smilingly interpose with the distich:

Its auspicious descent dispels the Emperor’s grief. There lies one frozen-stiff, but who asks him a word?

Pao-ch’in too speedily put on a smile and added: Glad is the proud wayfarer when he’s pressed to drink. Snapped is the weaving belt in the heavenly machine.

Hsiang-yün once again eagerly quoted the line:

In the seaside market is lost a silk kerchief.

But Lin Tai-yü would not let her continue, and taking up the thread, she forthwith said:

With quiet silence, it enshrouds the raiséd kiosque.

Hsiang-yün vehemently gave the antithetical verse:

The utter poor clings to his pannier and his bowl.

Pao-ch’in too would not give in as a favour to any one, so hastily she exclaimed:

The water meant to brew the tea with gently bubbles up.

Hsiang-yün saw how excited they were getting and she thought it naturally great fun. Laughing, she eagerly gave out:

When wine is boiled with leaves ‘tis not easy to burn.

Tai-yü also smiled while suggesting:

The broom, with which the bonze sweepeth the hill, is sunk in snow.

Pao-ch’in too smilingly cried:

The young lad takes away the lute interred in snow.

Hsiang-yün laughed to such a degree that she was bent in two; and she muttered a line with such rapidity that one and all inquired of her: “What are you, after all, saying?”

In the stone tower leisurely sleeps the stork.

Hsiang-yün repeated.

Tai-yü clasped her breast so convulsed was she with laughter. With loud voice she bawled out:

Th’ embroidered carpet warms the affectionate cat.

Pao-ch’in quickly, again laughingly, exclaimed:

Inside Selene’s cave lo, roll the silvery waves.

Hsiang-yün added, with eager haste:

Within the city walls at eve was hid a purple flag.

Tai-yü with alacrity continued with a smile:

The fragrance sweet, which penetrates into the plums, is good to eat.

Pao-ch’ai smiled. “What a fine line!” she ejaculated; after which, she hastened to complete the couplet by saying:

The drops from the bamboo are meet, when one is drunk, to mix with wine.

Pao-ch’in likewise made haste to add:

Betimes, the hymeneal girdle it moistens.

Hsiang-yün eagerly paired it with:

Oft, it freezeth on the kingfisher shoes.

Tai-yü once more exclaimed with vehemence:

No wind doth blow, but yet there is a rush.

Pao-ch'in promptly also smiled, and strung on:

No rain lo falls, but still a patter's heard.

Hsiang-yün was leaning over, indulging in such merriment that she was quite doubled up in two. But everybody else had realised that the trio was struggling for mastery, so without attempting to versify they kept their gaze fixed on them and gave way to laughter.

Tai-yü gave her another push to try and induce her to go on. "Do you also sometimes come to your wits' ends; and run to the end of your tether?" she went on to say. "I'd like to see what other stuff and nonsense you can come out with!"

Hsiang-yün however simply fell forward on Pao-ch'ai's lap and laughed incessantly.

"If you've got any gumption about you," Pao-ch'ai exclaimed, shoving her up, "take the second rhymes under 'Hsiao' and exhaust them all, and I'll then bend the knee to you."

"It isn't as if I were writing verses," Hsiang-yün laughed rising to her feet; "it's really as if I were fighting for very life."

"It's for you to come out with something," they all cried with a laugh.

T'an Ch'un had long ago determined in her mind that there could be no other antithetical sentences that she herself could possibly propose, and she forthwith set to work to copy out the verses. But as she passed the remark: "They haven't as yet been brought to a proper close," Li Wen took up the clue, as soon as she caught her words, and added the sentiment:

My wish is to record this morning's fun.

Li Ch'i then suggested as a finale the line:

By these verses, I'd fain sing th' Emperor's praise.

“That’s enough, that will do!” Li Wan cried. “The rhymes haven’t, I admit, been exhausted, but any outside words you might introduce, will, if used in a forced sense, be worth nothing at all.”

While continuing their arguments, the various inmates drew near and kept up a searching criticism for a time.

Hsiang-yün was found to be the one among them, who had devised the largest number of lines.

“This is mainly due,” they unanimously laughed, “to the virtue of that piece of venison!”

“Let’s review them line by line as they come,” Li Wan smilingly proposed, “but yet as if they formed one continuous poem. Here’s Pao-yü last again!”

“I haven’t, the fact is, the knack of pairing sentences,” Pao-yü rejoined with a smile. “You’d better therefore make some allowance for me!”

“There’s no such thing as making allowances for you in meeting after meeting,” Li Wan demurred laughing, “that you should again after that give out the rhymes in a reckless manner, waste your time and not show yourself able to put two lines together. You must absolutely bear a penalty today. I just caught a glimpse of the red plum in the Lung Ts’ui monastery; and how charming it is! I meant to have plucked a twig to put in a vase, but so loathsome is the way in which Miao Yü goes on, that I won’t have anything to do with her! But we’ll punish him by making him, for the sake of fun, fetch a twig for us to put in water.”

“This penalty,” they shouted with one accord, “is both excellent as well as pleasant.”

Pao-yü himself was no less delighted to carry it into execution, so signifying his readiness to comply with their wishes, he felt desirous to be off at once.

“It’s exceedingly cold outside,” Hsiang-yün and Tai-yü simultaneously remarked, “so have a glass of warm wine before you go.”

Hsiang-yün speedily took up the kettle, and Tai-yü handed him a large cup, filled to the very brim.

“Now swallow the wine we give you,” Hsiang-yün smiled. “And if you don’t bring any plum blossom, we’ll inflict a double penalty.”

Pao-yü gulped down hurry-scurry the whole contents of the cup and started on his errand in the face of the snow.

“Follow him carefully.” Li Wan enjoined the servants.

Tai-yü, however, hastened to interfere and make her desist. “There’s no such need,” she cried. “Were any one to go with him, he’ll contrariwise not get the flowers.”

Li Wan nodded her head. “Yes!” she assented, and then went on to direct a waiting-maid to bring a vase, in the shape of a beautiful girl with high shoulders, to fill it with water, and get it ready to put the plum blossom in. “And when he comes back,” she felt induced to add, “we must recite verses on the red plum.”

“I’ll indite a stanza in advance,” eagerly exclaimed Hsiang-yün.

“We’ll on no account let you indite any more to-day,” Pao-ch’ai laughed. “You beat every one of us hollow; so if we sit with idle hands, there won’t be any fun. But by and bye we’ll fine Pao-yü; and, as he says that he can’t pair antithetical lines, we’ll now make him compose a stanza himself.”

“This is a capital idea!” Tai-yü smiled. “But I’ve got another proposal. As the lines just paired are not sufficient, won’t it be well to pick out those who’ve put together the fewest distiches, and make them versify on the red plum blossom?”

“An excellent proposal!” Pao-ch’ai ventured laughing. “The three girls Hsing Chou-yen, Li Wen and Li Ch’i, failed just now to do justice to their talents; besides they are visitors; and as Ch’in Erh, P’in Erh and Yün Erh got the best of us by a good deal, it’s only right that none of us should compose any more, and that that trio should only do so.”

“Ch’i Erh,” Li Wan thereupon retorted, “is also not a very good hand at verses, let therefore cousin Ch’in have a try!”

Pao-ch’ai had no alternative but to express her acquiescence.

“Let the three words ‘red plum blossom,’” she then suggested, “be used for

rhymes; and let each person compose an heptameter stanza. Cousin Hsing to indite on the word ‘red;’ your elder cousin Li on ‘plum;’ and Ch’in Erh on ‘blossom.’”

“If you let Pao-yü off,” Li Wan interposed, “I won’t have it!”

“I’ve got a capital theme,” Hsiung-yün eagerly remarked, “so let’s make him write some!”

“What theme is it?” one and all inquired.

“If we made him,” Hsiang-yün resumed, “versify on: ‘In search of Miao Yü to beg for red plum blossom,’ won’t it be full of fun?”

“That will be full of zest,” the party exclaimed, upon hearing the theme propounded by her. But hardly had they given expression to their approval than they perceived Pao-yü come in, beaming with smiles and glee, and holding with both hands a branch of red plum blossom. The maids hurriedly relieved him of his burden and put the branch in the vase, and the inmates present came over in a body to feast their eyes on it.

“Well, may you look at it now,” Pao-yü smiled. “You’ve no idea what an amount of trouble it has cost me!”

As he uttered these words, T’an Ch’un handed him at once another cup of warm wine; and the maids approached, and took his wrapper and hat, and shook off the snow.

But the servant-girls attached to their respective quarters then brought them over extra articles of clothing. Hsi Jen, in like manner, despatched a domestic with a pelisse, the worse for wear, lined with fur from foxes’ ribs, so Li Wan, having directed a servant to fill a plate with steamed large taros, and to make up two dishes with red-skinned oranges, yellow coolie oranges, olives and other like things, bade some one take them over to Hsi Jen.

Hsiang-yün also communicated to Pao-yü the subject for verses they had decided upon a short while back. But she likewise urged Pao-yü to be quick and accomplish his task.

“Dear senior cousin, dear junior cousin,” pleaded Pao-yü, “let me use my own

rhymes. Don’t bind me down to any.”

“Go on as you like,” they replied with one consent.

But conversing the while, they passed the plum blossom under inspection.

This bough of plum blossom was, in fact, only two feet in height; but from the side projected a branch, crosswise, about two or three feet in length the small twigs and stalks on which resembled coiled dragons, or crouching earthworms; and were either single and trimmed pencil-like, or thick and bushy grove-like. Indeed, their appearance was as if the blossom spurted cosmetic. This fragrance put orchids to the blush. So every one present contributed her quota of praise.

Chou-yen, Li Wen and Pao-ch’in had, little though it was expected, all three already finished their lines and each copied them out for herself, so the company began to peruse their compositions, subjoined below, in the order of the three words: ‘red plum blossom.’

Verses to the red plum blossom by Hsing Chou-yen.

The peach tree has not donned its fragrance yet, the almond is not red. What time it strikes the cold, it’s first joyful to smile at the east wind. When its spirit to the Yü Ling hath flown, ‘tis hard to say ‘tis spring. The russet clouds across the ‘Lo Fu’ lie, so e’en to dreams it’s closed. The green petals add grace to a coiffure, when painted candles burn. The simple elf when primed with wine doth the waning rainbow bestride. Does its appearance speak of a colour of ordinary run? Both dark and light fall of their own free will into the ice and snow.

The next was the production of Li Wen, and its burden was:

To write on the white plum I’m not disposed, but I’ll write on the red. Proud of its beauteous charms, ‘tis first to meet the opening drunken eye. On its frost-nipped face are marks; and these consist wholly of blood. Its heart is sore, but no anger it knows; to ashes too it turns. By some mistake a pill (a fairy) takes and quits her real frame. From the fairyland pool she secret drops, and casts off her old form. In spring, both north and south of the river, with splendour it doth bloom. Send word to bees and butterflies that they need not give way to fears!

This stanza came next from the pen of Hsüeh Pao-ch’in,

Far distant do the branches grow; but how beauteous the blossom blooms! The maidens try with profuse show to compete in their spring head-dress. No snow remains on the vacant pavilion and the tortuous rails. Upon the running stream and desolate hills descend the russet clouds. When cold prevails one can in a still dream follow the lass-blown fife. The wandering elf roweth in fragrant spring, the boat in the red stream. In a previous existence, it must sure have been of fairy form. No doubt need ‘gain arise as to its beauty differing from then.

The perusal over, they spent some time in heaping, smiling the while, eulogiums upon the compositions. And they pointed at the last stanza as the best of the lot; which made it evident to Pao-yü that Pao-ch’in, albeit the youngest in years, was, on the other hand, the quickest in wits.

Tai-yü and Hsiang-yün then filled up a small cup with wine and simultaneously offered their congratulations to Pao-ch’in.

“Each of the three stanzas has its beauty,” Pao-ch’ai remarked, a smile playing round her lips. “You two have daily made a fool of me, and are you now going to fool her also?”

“Have you got yours ready?” Li Wan went on to inquire of Pao-yü.

“I’d got them,” Pao-yü promptly answered, “but the moment I read their three stanzas, I once more became so nervous that they quite slipped from my mind. But let me think again.”

Hsiang-yün, at this reply, fetched a copper poker, and, while beating on the hand-stove, she laughingly said: “I shall go on tattooing. Now mind if when the drumming ceases, you haven’t accomplished your task, you’ll have to bear another fine.”

“I’ve already got them!” Pao-yü rejoined, smilingly.

Tai-yü then picked up a pencil. “Recite them,” she smiled, “and I’ll write them down.”

Hsiang-yün beat one stroke (on the stove). “The first tattoo is over,” she laughed.

“I’m ready,” Pao-yü smiled. “Go on writing.”

At this, they heard him recite:

The wine bottle is not opened, the line is not put into shape.

Tai-yü noted it down, and shaking her head, “They begin very smoothly,” she said, as she smiled.

“Be quick!” Hsiang-yün again urged.

Pao-yü laughingly continued:

To fairyland I speed to seek for spring, and the twelfth moon to find.

Tai-yü and Hsiang-yün both nodded. “It’s rather good,” they smiled.

Pao-yü resumed, saying:

I will not beg the high god for a bottle of the (healing) dew, But pray Shuang O to give me some plum bloom beyond the rails.

Tai-yü jotted the lines down and wagged her head to and fro. “They’re ingenious, that’s all,” she observed.

Hsiang-yün gave another rap with her hand.

Pao-yü thereupon smilingly added:

I come into the world and, in the cold, I pick out some red snow. I leave the dusty sphere and speed to pluck the fragrant purple clouds. I bring a jagged branch, but who in pity sings my shoulders thin? On my clothes still sticketh the moss from yon Buddhistic court.

As soon as Tai-yü had done writing, Hsiang-yün and the rest of the company began to discuss the merits of the verses; but they then saw several servant-maids rush in, shouting: “Our venerable mistress has come.”

One and all hurried out with all despatch to meet her. “How comes it that she is in such good cheer?” every one also laughed.

Speaking the while, they discerned, at a great distance, their grandmother Chia seated, enveloped in a capacious wrapper, and rolled up in a warm hood lined

with squirrel fur, in a small bamboo sedan-chair with an open green silk glazed umbrella in her hand. Yüan Yang, Hu Po and some other girls, mustering in all five or six, held each an umbrella and pressed round the chair, as they advanced.

Li Wan and her companions went up to them with hasty step; but dowager lady Chia directed the servants to make them stop; explaining that it would be quite enough if they stood where they were.

On her approach, old lady Chia smiled. “I’ve given,” she observed, “your Madame Wang and that girl Feng the slip and come. What deep snow covers the ground! For me, I’m seated in this, so it doesn’t matter; but you mustn’t let those ladies trudge in the snow.”

The various followers rushed forward to take her wrapper and to support her, and as they did so, they expressed their acquiescence.

As soon as she got indoors old lady Chia was the first to exclaim with a beaming face: “What beautiful plum blossom! You well know how to make merry; but I too won’t let you off!”

But in the course of her remarks, Li Wan quickly gave orders to a domestic to fetch a large wolf skin rug, and to spread it in the centre, so dowager lady Chia made herself comfortable on it. “Just go on as before with your romping and joking, drinking and eating,” she then laughed. “As the days are so short, I did not venture to have a midday siesta. After therefore playing at dominoes for a time, I bethought myself of you people, and likewise came to join the fun.”

Li Wan soon also presented her a hand-stove, while T’an Ch’un brought an extra set of cups and chopsticks, and filling with her own hands, a cup with warm wine, she handed it to her grandmother Chia. Old lady Chia swallowed a sip. “What’s there in that dish?” she afterwards inquired.

The various inmates hurriedly carried it over to her, and explained that ‘they were pickled quails.’

“These won’t hurt me,” dowager lady Chia said, “so cut off a piece of the leg and give it to me.”

“Yes!” promptly acquiesced Li Wan, and asking for water, she washed her hands, and then came in person to carve the quail.

“Sit down again,” dowager lady Chia said, pressing them, “and go on with your chatting and laughing. Let me hear you, and feel happy. Just you also seat yourself,” continuing, she remarked to Li Wan, “and behave as if I were not here. If you do so, well and good. Otherwise, I shall take myself off at once.”

But it was only when they heard how persistent she was in her solicitations that they all resumed the seats, which accorded with their age, with the exception of Li Wan, who moved to the furthest side.

“What were you playing at?” old lady Chia thereupon asked.

“We were writing verses,” answered the whole party.

“Wouldn’t it be well for those who are up to poetry,” dowager lady Chia suggested; “to devise a few puns for lanterns so that the whole lot of us should be able to have some fun in the first moon?”

With one voice, they expressed their approval. But after they had jested for a little time; “It’s damp in here;” old lady Chia said, “so don’t you sit long, for mind you might be catching cold. Where it’s nice and warm is in your cousin Quarta’s over there, so let’s all go and see how she is getting on with her painting, and whether it will be ready or not by the end of the year.”

“How could it be completed by the close of the year?” they smiled. “She could only, we fancy, get it ready by the dragon boat festival next year.”

“This is dreadful!” old lady Chia exclaimed. “Why, she has really wasted more labour on it than would have been actually required to lay out this garden!”

With these words still on her lips, she ensconced herself again in the bamboo sedan, and closed in or followed by the whole company, she repaired to the Lotus Fragrance Arbour, where they got into a narrow passage, flanked on the east as well as the west, with doors from which they could cross the street. Over these doorways on the inside as well as outside were inserted alike tablets made of stone. The door they went in by, on this occasion, lay on the west. On the tablet facing outwards, were cut out the two words representing: ‘Penetrating into the clouds.’ On that inside, were engraved the two characters meaning: ‘crossing to the moon.’ On their arrival at the hall, they walked in by the main entrance, which looked towards the south. Dowager lady Chia then alighted from her chair. Hsi Ch’un had already made her appearance out of doors to

welcome her, so taking the inner covered passage, they passed over to the other side and reached Hsi Ch'un's bedroom; on the door posts of which figured the three words: 'Warm fragrance isle.' Several servants were at once at hand; and no sooner had they raised the red woollen portière, than a soft fragrance wafted itself into their faces. The various inmates stepped into the room. Old lady Chia, however, did not take a seat, but simply inquired where the painting was.

"The weather is so bitterly cold," Hsi Ch'un consequently explained smiling, "that the glue, whose property is mainly to coagulate, cannot be moistened, so I feared that, were I to have gone on with the painting, it wouldn't be worth looking at; and I therefore put it away."

"I must have it by the close of the year," dowager lady Chia laughed, "so don't idle your time away. Produce it at once and go on painting for me, as quick as you can."

But scarcely had she concluded her remark, than she unexpectedly perceived lady Feng arrive, smirking and laughing, with a purple pelisse, lined with deer fur, thrown over her shoulders. "Venerable senior!" she shouted, "You don't even so much as let any one know to-day, but sneak over stealthily. I've had a good hunt for you!"

When old lady Chia saw her join them, she felt filled with delight. "I was afraid," she rejoined, "that you'd be feeling cold. That's why, I didn't allow any one to tell you. You're really as sharp as a spirit to have, at last, been able to trace my whereabouts! But according to strict etiquette, you shouldn't show filial piety to such a degree!"

"Is it out of any idea of filial piety that I came after you? Not at all!" lady Feng added with a laugh. "But when I got to your place, worthy senior, I found everything so quiet that not even the caw of a crow could be heard, and when I asked the young maids where you'd gone, they wouldn't let me come and search in the garden. So I began to give way to surmises. Suddenly also arrived two or three nuns; and then, at length, I jumped at the conclusion that these women must have come to bring their yearly prayers, or to ask for their annual or incense allowance, and that, with the amount of things you also, venerable ancestor, have to do for the end of the year, you had for certain got out of the way of your debts. Speedily therefore I inquired of the nuns what it was that brought them there, and, for a fact, there was no mistake in my surmises. So

promptly issuing the annual allowances to them, I now come to report to you, worthy senior, that your creditors have gone, and that there's no need for you to skulk away. But I've had some tender pheasant prepared; so please come, and have your evening meal; for if you delay any longer, it will get quite stale."

As she spoke, everybody burst out laughing. But lady Feng did not allow any time to dowager lady Chia to pass any observations, but forthwith directed the servants to bring the chair over. Old lady Chia then smilingly laid hold of lady Feng's hand and got again into her chair; but she took along with her the whole company of relatives for a chat and a laugh.

Upon issuing out of the gate on the east side of the narrow passage, the four quarters presented to their gaze the appearance of being adorned with powder, and inlaid with silver. Unawares, they caught sight of Pao-ch'in, in a duck down cloak, waiting at a distance at the back of the hill slope; while behind her stood a maid, holding a vase full of red plum blossoms.

"Strange enough," they all exclaimed laughingly, "two of us were missing! But she's waiting over there. She's also been after some plum-blossom."

"Just look," dowager lady Chia eagerly cried out joyfully, "that human creature has been put there to match with the snow-covered hill! But with that costume, and the plum-blossom at the back of her, to what does she bear a resemblance?"

"She resembles," one and all smiled, "Chou Shih-ch'ou's beautiful snow picture, suspended in your apartments, venerable ancestor."

"Is there in that picture any such costume?" Old lady Chia demurred, nodding her head and smiling. "What's more the persons represented in it could never be so pretty!"

Hardly had this remark dropped from her mouth, than she discerned some one else, clad in a deep red woollen cloak, appear to view at the back of Pao-ch'in. "What other girl is that?" dowager lady Chia asked.

"We girls are all here." they laughingly answered. "That's Pao-yü."

"My eyes," old lady Chia smiled, "are getting dimmer and dimmer!"

So saying, they drew near, and of course, they turned out to be Pao-yü and Pao-

ch’in.

“I’ve just been again to the Lung Ts’ui monastery,” Pao-yü smiled to Pao-ch’ai, Tai-yü and his other cousins, “and Miao Yü gave me for each of you a twig of plum blossom. I’ve already sent a servant to take them over.”

“Many thanks for the trouble you’ve been put to,” they, with one voice, replied.

But speaking the while, they sallied out of the garden gate, and repaired to their grandmother Chia’s suite of apartments. Their meal over, they joined in a further chat and laugh, when unexpectedly they saw Mrs. Hsüeh also arrive.

“With all this snow,” she observed, “I haven’t been over the whole day to see how you, venerable senior, were getting on. Your ladyship couldn’t have been in a good sort of mood to-day, for you should have gone and seen the snow.”

“How not in a good mood?” old lady Chia exclaimed. “I went and looked up these young ladies and had a romp with them for a time.”

“Last night,” Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, “I was thinking of getting from our Madame Wang to-day the loan of the garden for the nonce and spreading two tables with our mean wine, and inviting you, worthy senior, to enjoy the snow; but as I saw that you were having a rest, and I heard, at an early hour, that Pao-yü had said that you were not in a joyful frame of mind, I did not, in consequence, presume to come and disturb you to-day. But had I known sooner the real state of affairs, I would have felt it my bounden duty to have asked you round.”

“This is,” rejoined dowager lady Chia with a smile, “only the first fall of snow in the tenth moon. We’ll have, after this, plenty of snowy days so there will be ample time to put your ladyship to wasteful expense.”

“Verily in that case,” Mrs. Hsüeh laughingly added, “my filial intentions may well be looked upon as having been accomplished.”

“Mrs. Hsüeh,” interposed lady Feng smiling, “mind you don’t forget it! But you might as well weigh fifty taels this very moment, and hand them over to me to keep, until the first fall of snow, when I can get everything ready for the banquet. In this way, you will neither have anything to bother you, aunt, nor will you have a chance of forgetting.”

“Well, since that be so,” old lady Chia remarked with a laugh, “your ladyship had better give her fifty taels, and I’ll share it with her; each one of us taking twenty-five taels; and on any day it might snow, I’ll pretend I don’t feel in proper trim and let it slip by. You’ll have thus still less occasion to trouble yourself, and I and lady Feng will reap a substantial benefit.”

Lady Feng clapped her hands. “An excellent idea,” she laughed. “This quite falls in with my views.”

The whole company were much amused.

“Pshaw!” dowager lady Chia laughingly ejaculated. “You barefaced thing! (You’re like a snake, which) avails itself of the rod, with which it is being beaten, to crawl up (and do harm)! You don’t try to convince us that it properly devolves upon us, as Mrs. Hsüeh is our guest and receives such poor treatment in our household, to invite her; for with what right could we subject her ladyship to any reckless outlay? but you have the impudence, of impressing upon our minds to insist upon the payment, in advance, of fifty taels! Are you really not thoroughly ashamed of yourself?”

“Oh, worthy senior,” lady Feng laughed, “you’re most sharp-sighted! You try to see whether Mrs. Hsüeh will be soft enough to produce fifty taels for you to share with me, but fancying now that it’s of no avail, you turn round and begin to rate me by coming out with all these grand words! I won’t however take any money from you, Mrs. Hsüeh. I’ll, in fact, contribute some on your ladyship’s account, and when I get the banquet ready and invite you, venerable ancestor, to come and partake of it, I’ll also wrap fifty taels in a piece of paper, and dutifully present them to you, as a penalty for my officious interference in matters that don’t concern me. Will this be all right or not?”

Before these words were brought to a close, the various inmates were so convulsed with hearty laughter that they reeled over on the stovecouch.

Dowager lady Chia then went on to explain how much nicer Pao-ch’in was, plucking plum blossom in the snow, than the very picture itself; and she next minutely inquired what the year, moon, day and hour of her birth were, and how things were getting on in her home.

Mrs. Hsüeh conjectured that the object she had in mind was, in all probability, to seek a partner for her. In the secret recesses of her heart, Mrs. Hsüeh on this

account fell in also with her views. (Pao-ch'in) had, however, already been promised in marriage to the Mei family. But as dowager lady Chia had made, as yet, no open allusion to her intentions, (Mrs. Hsüeh) did not think it nice on her part to come out with any definite statement, and she accordingly observed to old lady Chia in a vague sort of way: "What a pity it is that this girl should have had so little good fortune as to lose her father the year before last. But ever since her youth up, she has seen much of the world, for she has been with her parent to every place of note. Her father was a man fond of pleasure; and as he had business in every direction, he took his family along with him. After tarrying in this province for a whole year, he would next year again go to that province, and spend half a year roaming about it everywhere. Hence it is that he had visited five or six tenths of the whole empire. The other year, when they were here, he engaged her to the son of the Hanlin Mei. But, as it happened, her father died the year after, and here is her mother too now ailing from a superfluity of phlegm."

Lady Feng gave her no time to complete what she meant to say. "Hai!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "What you say isn't opportune! I was about to act as a go-between. But is she too already engaged?"

"For whom did you mean to act as go-between?" old lady Chia smiled.

"My dear ancestor," lady Feng remarked, "don't concern yourself about it! I had determined in my mind that those two would make a suitable match. But as she has now long ago been promised to some one, it would be of no use, were I even to speak out. Isn't it better that I should hold my peace, and drop the whole thing?"

Dowager lady Chia herself was cognizant of lady Feng's purpose, so upon hearing that she already had a suitor, she at once desisted from making any further reference to the subject. The whole company then continued another chat on irrelevant matters for a time, after which, they broke up.

Nothing of any interest transpired the whole night. The next day, the snowy weather had cleared up. After breakfast, her grandmother Chia again pressed Hsi Ch'un. "You should go on," she said, "with your painting, irrespective of cold or heat. If you can't absolutely finish it by the end of the year, it won't much matter! The main thing is that you must at once introduce in it Ch'in Erh and the maid with the plum blossom, as we saw them yesterday, in strict accordance with the original and without the least discrepancy of so much as a stroke."

Hsi Ch’un listened to her and felt it her duty to signify her assent, in spite of the task being no easy one for her to execute.

After a time, a number of her relatives came, in a body, to watch the progress of the painting. But they discovered Hsi Ch’un plunged in a reverie. “Let’s leave her alone,” Li Wan smilingly observed to them all, “to proceed with her meditations; we can meanwhile have a chat among ourselves. Yesterday our worthy senior bade us devise a few lantern-conundrums, so when we got home, I and Ch’i Erh and Wen Erh did not turn in (but set to work). I composed a couple on the Four Books; but those two girls also managed to put together another pair of them.”

“We should hear what they’re like,” they laughingly exclaimed in chorus, when they heard what they had done. “Tell them to us first, and let’s have a guess!”

“The goddess of mercy has not been handed down by any ancestors.”

Li Ch’i smiled. “This refers to a passage in the Four Books.”

“In one’s conduct, one must press towards the highest benevolence.”

Hsiang-yün quickly interposed; taking up the thread of the conversation.

“You should ponder over the meaning of the three words implying: ‘handed down by ancestors’,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “before you venture a guess.”

“Think again!” Li Wan urged with a smile.

“I’ve guessed it!” Tai-yü smiled. “It’s:

“‘If, notwithstanding all that benevolence, there be no outward visible sign…’”

“That’s the line,” one and all unanimously exclaimed with a laugh.

“‘The whole pond is covered with rush.’”

“Now find the name of the rush?” Li Wan proceeded.

“This must certainly be the cat-tail rush!” hastily again replied Hsiang-yün. “Can this not be right?”

“You’ve succeeded in guessing it,” Li Wan smiled. “Li Wen’s is:

“‘Cold runs the stream along the stones;’

“bearing on the name of a man of old.”

“Can it be Shan T’ao?” T’an Ch’un smilingly asked.

“It is!” answered Li Wan.

“Ch’i Erh’s is the character ‘Yung’ (glow-worm). It refers to a single word,” Li Wan resumed.

The party endeavoured for a long time to hit upon the solution.

“The meaning of this is certainly deep,” Pao-ch’in put in. “I wonder whether it’s the character, ‘hua,’ (flower) in the combination, ‘hua ts’ao, (vegetation).”

“That’s just it!” Li Ch’i smiled.

“What has a glow-worm to do with flowers?” one and all observed.

“It’s capital!” Tai-yü ventured with a smile. “Isn’t a glow-worm transformed from plants?”

The company grasped the sense; and, laughing the while, they, with one consent, shouted out, “splendid!”

“All these are, I admit, good,” Pao-ch’ai remarked, “but they won’t suit our venerable senior’s taste. Won’t it be better therefore to compose a few on some simple objects; some which all of us, whether polished or unpolished, may be able to enjoy?”

“Yes,” they all replied, “we should also think of some simple ones on ordinary objects.”

“I’ve devised one on the ‘Tien Chiang Ch’un’ metre,” Hsiang-yün pursued, after some reflection. “But it’s really on an ordinary object. So try and guess it.”

Saying this, she forthwith went on to recite:

The creeks and valleys it leaves; Travelling the world, it performs. In truth how funny it is! But renown and gain are still vain; Ever hard behind it is its fate.

A conundrum.

None of those present could fathom what it could be. After protracted thought, some made a guess, by saying it was a bonze. Others maintained that it was a Taoist priest. Others again divined that it was a marionette.

“All your guesses are wrong,” Pao-yü chimed in, after considerable reflection. “I’ve got it! It must for a certainty be a performing monkey.”

“That’s really it!” Hsiang-yün laughed.

“The first part is all right,” the party observed, “but how do you explain the last line?”

“What performing monkey,” Hsiang-yün asked, “has not had its tail cut off?”

Hearing this, they exploded into a fit of merriment. “Even,” they argued, “the very riddles she improvises are perverse and strange!”

“Mrs. Hsüeh mentioned yesterday that you, cousin Ch’in, had seen much of the world,” Li Wan put in, “and that you had also gone about a good deal. It’s for you therefore to try your hand at a few conundrums. What’s more your poetry too is good. So why shouldn’t you indite a few for us to guess?”

Pao-ch’in, at this proposal, nodded her head, and while repressing a smile, she went off by herself to give way to thought.

Pao-ch’ai then also gave out this riddle:

Carved sandal and cut cedar rise layer upon layer. Have they been piled and fashioned by workmen of skill! In the mid-heavens it’s true, both wind and rain fleet by; But can one hear the tingling of the Buddhists’ bell?

While they were giving their mind to guessing what it could be, Pao-yü too recited:

Both from the heavens and from the earth, it’s indistinct to view. What time

the ‘Lang Ya’ feast goes past, then mind you take great care. When the ‘luan’s’ notes you catch and the crane’s message thou’lt look up: It is a splendid thing to turn and breathe towards the vault of heaven, (a kite)

Tai-yü next added:

Why need a famous steed be a with bridle e’er restrained? Through the city it speeds; the moat it skirts; how fierce it looks. The master gives the word and wind and clouds begin to move. On the ‘fish backs’ and the ‘three isles’ it only makes a name, (a rotating lantern).

T’an Ch’un had also one that she felt disposed to tell them, but just as she was about to open her lips, Pao-ch’in walked up to them. “The relics of various places I’ve seen since my youth,” she smiled, “are not few, so I’ve now selected ten places of historic interest, on which I’ve composed ten odes, treating of antiquities. The verses may possibly be coarse, but they bear upon things of the past, and secretly refer as well to ten commonplace articles. So, cousins, please try and guess them!”

“This is ingenious!” they exclaimed in chorus, when they heard the result of her labour. “Why not write them out, and let us have a look at them?”

But, reader, peruse the next chapter, if you want to learn what follows.

CHAPTER LI.

The young maiden Hsüeh Pao-ch’in devises, in novel style, odes bearing on antiquities. A stupid doctor employs, in reckless manner, drugs of great strength.

When the party heard, the story goes, that Pao-ch’in had made the old places of interest she had, in days gone by, visited in the various provinces, the theme of her verses, and that she had composed ten stanzas with four lines in each, which though referring to relics of antiquity, bore covertly on ten common objects, they all opined that they must be novel and ingenious, and they vied with each other in examining the text. On perusal, they read:

On the relics of Ch’ih Pi:

Deep in Ch’ih Pi doth water lie concealed which does not onward flow. There but remains a name and surname contained in an empty boat. When with a clamorous din the fire breaks out, the sad wind waxes cold. An endless host of eminent spirits wander about inside.

On the ancient remains in Chiao Chih:

Posts of copper and walls of gold protect the capital. Its fame is spread beyond the seas, scattered in foreign lands. How true it is that Ma Yüan’s achievements have been great. The flute of iron need not trouble to sing of Tzu Fang.

On the vestiges of former times in Chung Shan:

Renown and gain do they, at any time, fall to a woman’s share? For no reason have I been bidden come into the mortal world. How hard a task, in point of fact, it is to stop solicitude! Don’t bear a grudge against such people as may oft times jeer at you!

On things of historic interest in Huai Yin:

The sturdy man must ever mind the insults of the vicious dog. Th’ official’s rank in San Ch’i was but fixed when his coffin was closed Tell all people that upon earth do dwell to look down upon none. The bounty of one single bowl of rice should be treasured till death.

On events of old in Kuang Lin:

Cicadas chirp; crows roost; but, in a twinkle, they are gone. How fares these latter days the scenery in Sui T’i? It’s all because he has so long enjoyed so fine a fame, That he has given rise around to so many disputes.

On the ancient remains of the T’ao Yeh ferry:

Dry grass and parchèd plants their reflex cast upon the shallow pond. The peach tree branches and peach leaves will bid farewell at last. What a large number of structures in Liu Ch’ao raise their heads. A small picture with a motto hangs on the hollow wall.

On the antique vestiges of Ch’ing Chung:

The black stream stretches far and wide, but hindered is its course. What time were no more thrummed the frozen cords, the songs waxed sad. The policy of the Han dynasty was in truth strange! A worthless officer must for a thousand years feel shame.

On things of historic renown in Ma Wei:

Quiet the spots of rouge with sweat pile up and shine. Gentleness in a moment vanishes and goes. It is because traces remain of his fine looks, That to this day his clothes a fragrance still emit.

On events of the past connected with the Pu Tung temple:

The small red lamp is wholly made of thin bone, and is light. Furtively was it brought along but by force was it stol’n. Oft was it, it is true, hung by the mistress’ own hands, But long ere this has she allured it to speed off with her.

On the scenery about the Mei Hua (Plum Bloom) monastery.

If not by the plum trees, then by the willows it must be. Has any one picked up in there the likeness of a girl? Don’t fret about meeting again; in spring its scent returns. Soon as it’s gone, and west winds blow, another year has flown.

When the party had done reading the verses, they with perfect unanimity extolled their extraordinary excellence. Pao-ch’ai was, however, the first to raise any objections. “The first eight stanzas,” she said, “are founded upon the testimony of the historical works. But as for the last two stanzas, there’s no knowing where they come from. Besides, we don’t quite fathom their meaning. Wouldn’t it be better then if two other stanzas were written?”

Tai-yü hastened to interrupt her. “The lines composed by cousin Pao ch’in are indeed devised in a too pigheaded and fast-and-loose sort of way,” she observed. “The two stanzas are, I admit, not to be traced in the historical works, but though we’ve never read such outside traditions, and haven’t any idea what lies at the bottom of them, have we not likely seen a couple of plays? What child of three years old hasn’t some notion about them, and how much more such as we?”

“What she says is perfectly correct,” T’an Ch’un chimed in.

“She has besides,” Li Wan then remarked, “been to these places herself. But though there be no mention anywhere of these two references, falsehoods have from old till now been propagated, and busybodies have, in fact, intentionally invented such relics of ancient times with a view of bamboozling people. That year, for instance, in which we travelled up here to the capital, we came across graves raised to Kuan, the sage, in three or four distinct places. Now the circumstances of the whole existence of Kuan the sage are established by actual proof, so how could there again in his case exist a lot of graves? This must arise from the esteem in which he is held by posterity for the way he acquitted himself of his duties during his lifetime. And it is presumably to this esteem that this fiction owes its origin. This is quite possible enough. Even in the ‘Kuang Yü Chi’, you will see that not only are numerous tombs of the sage Kuan spoken of, but that bygone persons of note are assigned tombs not few in number. But there are many more relics of antiquity, about which no testimony can be gathered. The matter treated in the two stanzas, now in point, is, of course, not borne out by any actual record; yet in every story, that is told, in every play, that is sung, and on the various slips as well used for fortune telling, it is invariably to be found. Old and young, men and women, do all understand it and speak of it, whether in proverbs or in their everyday talk. They don’t resemble, besides, the ballads encountered in the ‘Hsi Hsiang Chi,’ and ‘Mou Tan T’ing,’ to justify us to fear that we might be setting eyes upon some corrupt text. They are quite harmless; so we’d better keep them!”

Pao-ch’ai, after these arguments, dropped at length all discussion. They thereupon tried for a time to guess the stanzas. None, however, of their solutions turned out to be correct. But as the days in winter are short, and they saw that it was time for their evening meal, they adjourned to the front part of the compound for their supper.

The servants at this stage announced to Madame Wang that Hsi Jen’s elder brother, Hua Tzu-fang, was outside, and reported to her that he had entered the city to say that his mother was lying in bed dangerously ill, and that she was so longing to see her daughter that he had come to beg for the favour of taking Hsi Jen home on a visit. As soon as Madame Wang heard the news, she dilated for a while upon people’s mothers and daughters, and of course she did not withhold her consent. Sending therefore at the same time for lady Feng, she communicated the tidings to her, and enjoined her to deliberate, and take suitable action.

Lady Feng signified her willingness to do what was necessary, and, returning to her quarters, she there and then commissioned Chou Jui's wife to go and break the news to Hsi Jen. "Send also," she went on to direct Mrs. Chou, "for one of the married-women, who are in attendance when we go out-of-doors, and let you two, together with a couple of young maids, follow Hsi Jen home. But despatch four cart attendants, well up in years, to look everywhere for a spacious curricle for you as well as her, and a small carriage for the maids."

"All right!" acquiesced Chou Jui's wife. But just as she was about to start, lady Feng continued her injunctions. "Hsi Jen," she added; "is a person not fond of any fuss, so tell her that it's I who have given the orders; and impress upon her that she must put on several nice, coloured clothes, and pack up a large valise full of wearing apparel. Her valise, must be a handsome one; and she must take a decent hand-stove. Bid her too first come and look me up here when she's about to start."

Mrs. Chou promised to execute her directions and went on her way.

After a long interval, (lady Feng) actually saw Hsi Jen arrive, got up in full costume and head-gear, and with her two waiting-maids and Chou Jui's wife, who carried the hand-stove and the valise packed up with clothes. Lady Feng's eye was attracted by several golden hairpins and pearl ornaments of great brilliancy and beauty, which Hsi Jen wore in her coiffure. Her gaze was further struck by the peach-red stiff silk jacket she had on, brocaded with all sorts of flowers and lined with ermine, by her leek-green wadded jupe, artistically ornamented with coils of gold thread, and by the bluish satin and grey squirrel pelisse she was wrapped in.

"These three articles of clothing, given to you by our dowager lady," lady Feng smiled, "are all very nice; but this pelisse is somewhat too plain. If you wear this, you'll besides feel cold, so put on one with long fur."

"Our Madame Wang," Hsi Jen laughingly rejoined, "gave me this one with the grey squirrel. I've also got one with ermine. She says that when the end of the year draws nigh, she'll let me have one with long fur."

"I've got one with long fur," lady Feng proceeded with a smile. "I don't fancy it much as the fringe does not hang with grace. I was on the point of having it changed; but, never mind, I'll let you first use it; and, when at the close of the

year, Madame Wang has one made for you, I can then have mine altered, and it will come to the same thing as if you were returning it like that to me."

One and all laughed. "That's the way of talking into which her ladyship has got!" they observed. "There she is the whole year round recklessly carelessly and secretly making good, on Madame Wang's account, ever so many things; how many there is no saying; for really the things for which compensation is made, cannot be so much as enumerated; and does she ever go, and settle scores with Madame Wang? and here she comes, on this occasion, and gives vent again to this mean language, in order to poke fun at people!"

"How could Madame Wang," lady Feng laughed, "ever give a thought to such trifles as these? They are, in fact, matters of no consequence. Yet were I not to look after them, it would be a disgrace to all of us, and needless to say, I would myself get into some scrape. It's far better that I should dress you all properly, and so get a fair name and finish; for were each of you to cut the figure of a burnt cake, people would first and foremost ridicule me, by saying that in looking after the household I have, instead of doing good, been the means of making beggars of you!"

After hearing her out, the whole party heaved a sigh. "Who could ever be," they exclaimed, "so intuitively wise as you, to show, above, such regard for Madame Wang, and below, such consideration for her subordinates?"

In the course of these remarks, they noticed lady Feng bid P'ing Erh find the dark green stiff silk cloak with white fox, she had worn the day before, and give it to Hsi Jen. But perceiving, also, that in the way of a valise, she only had a double one made of black spotted, figured sarcenet, with a lining of light red pongee silk, and that its contents consisted merely of two wadded jackets, the worse for wear, and a pelisse, lady Feng went on to tell P'ing Erh to fetch a woollen wrapper, lined with jade-green pongee. But she ordered her besides to pack up a snow-cloak for her.

P'ing Erh walked away and produced the articles. The one was made of deep-red felt, and was old. The other was of deep-red soft satin, neither old nor new.

"I don't deserve so much as a single one of these," Hsi Jen said.

"Keep this felt one for yourself," P'ing Erh smiled, "and take this one along with you and tell some one to send it to that elderly girl, who while every one, in that

heavy fall of snow yesterday, was rolled up in soft satin, if not in felt, and while about ten dark red dresses were reflected in the deep snow and presented such a fine sight, was the only one attired in those shabby old clothes. She seems more than ever to raise her shoulders and double her back. She is really to be pitied; so take this now and give it to her!"

"She surreptitiously wishes to give my things away!" lady Feng laughed. "I haven't got enough to spend upon myself and here I have you, better still, to instigate me to be more open-handed!"

"This comes from the filial piety your ladyship has ever displayed towards Madame Wang," every one laughingly remarked, "and the fond love for those below you. For had you been mean and only thought of making much of things and not cared a rap for your subordinates, would that girl have presumed to behave in this manner?"

"If any one therefore has read my heart, it's she," lady Feng rejoined with a laugh, "but yet she only knows it in part."

At the close of this rejoinder, she again spoke to Hsi Jen. "If your mother gets well, all right," she said; "but if anything happens to her, just stay over, and send some one to let me know so that I may specially despatch a servant to bring you your bedding. But whatever you do, don't, use their bedding, nor any of their things to comb your hair with. As for you people," continuing, she observed to Mrs. Chou Jui, "you no doubt are aware of the customs, prevailing in this establishment, so that I can dispense with giving you any injunctions."

"Yes, we know them all," Mrs. Chou Jui assented. "As soon as we get there, we'll, of course, request their male inmates to retire out of the way. And in the event of our having to stay over, we'll naturally apply for one or two extra inner rooms."

With these words still on her lips, she followed Hsi Jen out of the apartment. Then directing the servant-boys to prepare the lanterns, they, in due course, got into their curricle, and came to Hua Tzu-fang's quarters, where we will leave them without any further comment.

Lady Feng, meanwhile, sent also for two nurses from the I Hung court. "I am afraid," she said to them, "that Hsi Jen won't come back, so if there be any elderly girl, who has to your knowledge, so far, had her wits about her, depute

her to come and keep night watch in Pao-yü‘s rooms. But you nurses must likewise take care and exercise some control, for you mustn’t let Pao-yü recklessly kick up any trouble!”

“Quite so,” answered the two nurses, agreeing to her directions, after which, they quitted her presence. But not a long interval expired before they came to report the result of their search. “We’ve set our choice upon Ch’ing Wen and She Yüeh to put up in his rooms,” they reported. “We four will take our turn and look after things during the night.”

When lady Feng heard these arrangements, she nodded her head. “At night,” she observed, “urge him to retire to bed soon; and in the morning press him to get up at an early hour.”

The nurses replied that they would readily carry out her orders and returned alone into the garden.

In a little time Chou Jui’s wife actually brought the news, which she imparted to lady Feng, that: “as her mother was already beyond hope, Hsi Jen could not come back.”

Lady Feng then explained things to Madame Wang, and sent, at the same time, servants to the garden of Broad Vista to fetch (Hsi Jen’s) bedding and toilet effects.

Pao-yü watched Ch’ing Wen and She Yüeh get all her belongings in proper order. After the things had been despatched, Ch’ing Wen and She Yüeh divested themselves of their remaining fineries and changed their jupes and jackets. Ch’ing Wen seated herself round a warming-frame.

“Now,” She Yüeh smiled, “you’re not to put on the airs of a young lady! I advise you to also move about a bit.”

“When you’re all clean gone,” Ch’ing Wen returned for answer, “I shall have ample time to budge. But every day that you people are here, I shall try and enjoy peace and quiet.”

“My dear girl,” She Yüeh laughed, “I’ll make the bed, but drop the cover over that cheval-glass and put the catches right; you are so much taller than I.”

So saying, she at once set to work to arrange the bed for Pao-yü.

“Hai!” ejaculated Ch’ing Wen smiling, “one just sits down to warm one’s self, and here you come and disturb one!”

Pao-yü had at this time been sitting, plunged in a despondent mood. The thought of Hsi Jen’s mother had crossed through his mind and he was wondering whether she could be dead or alive, when unexpectedly overhearing Ch’ing Wen pass the remarks she did, he speedily sprung up, and came out himself and dropped the cover of the glass, and fastened the contrivance, after which he walked into the room. “Warm yourselves,” he smiled, “I’ve done all there was to be done.”

“I can’t manage,” Ch’ing Wen rejoined smiling, “to get warm at all. It just also strikes me that the warming-pan hasn’t yet been brought.”

“You’ve had the trouble to think of it!” She Yüeh observed. “But you’ve never wanted a chafing-dish before. It’s so warm besides on that warming-frame of ours; not like the stovecouch in that room, which is so cold; so we can very well do without it to-day.”

“If both of you are to sleep on that,” Pao-yü smiled, “there won’t be a soul with me outside, and I shall be in an awful funk. Even you won’t be able to have a wink of sleep during the whole night!”

“As far as I’m concerned,” Ch’ing Wen put in, “I’m going to sleep in here. There’s She Yüeh, so you’d better induce her to come and sleep outside.”

But while they kept up this conversation, the first watch drew near, and She Yüeh at once lowered the mosquito-curtain, removed the lamp, burnt the joss-sticks, and waited upon Pao-yü until he got into bed. The two maids then retired to rest. Ch’ing Wen reclined all alone on the warming-frame, while She Yüeh lay down outside the winter apartments.

The third watch had come and gone, when Pao-yü, in the midst of a dream, started calling Hsi Jen. He uttered her name twice, but no one was about to answer him. And it was after he had stirred himself out of sleep that he eventually recalled to mind that Hsi Jen was not at home, and he had a hearty fit laughter to himself.

Ch’ing Wen however had been roused out of her sleep, and she called She Yüeh. “Even I,” she said, “have been disturbed, fast asleep though I was; and, lo, she keeps a lookout by his very side and doesn’t as yet know anything about his cries! In very deed she is like a stiff corpse!”

She Yüeh twisted herself round and yawned. “He calls Hsi Jen,” she smilingly rejoined, “so what’s that to do with me? What do you want?” proceeding, she then inquired of him.

“I want some tea,” Pao-yü replied.

She Yüeh hastily jumped out of bed, with nothing on but a short wadded coat of red silk.

“Throw my pelisse over you;” Pao-yü cried; “for mind it’s cold!”

She Yüeh at these words put back her hands, and, taking the warm pelisse, lined even up to the lapel, with fur from the neck of the sable, which Pao-yü had put on on getting up, she threw it over her shoulders and went below and washed her hands in the basin. Then filling first a cup with tepid water, she brought a large cuspidor for Pao-yü to wash his mouth. Afterwards, she drew near the tea-case, and getting a cup, she first rinsed it with lukewarm water, and pouring half a cup of tea from the warm teapot, she handed it to Pao-yü. After he had done, she herself rinsed her mouth, and swallowed half a cupful of tea.

“My dear girl,” Ch’ing Wen interposed smiling, “do give me also a sip.”

“You put on more airs than ever,” She Yüeh laughed.

“My dear girl;” Ch’ing Wen added, “tomorrow night, you needn’t budge; I’ll wait on you the whole night long. What do you say to that?”

Hearing this, She Yüeh had no help but to attend to her as well, while she washed her mouth, and to pour a cup of tea and give it to her to drink.

“Won’t you two go to sleep,” She Yüeh laughed, “but keep on chatting? I’ll go out for a time; I’ll be back soon.”

“Are there any evil spirits waiting for you outside?” Ch’ing Wen smiled.

“It’s sure to be bright moonlight out of doors,” Pao-yü observed, “so go, while we continue our chat.”

So speaking, he coughed twice.

She Yüeh opened the back-door, and raising the woollen portière and looking out, she saw what a beautiful moonlight there really was.

Ch’ing Wen allowed her just time enough to leave the room, when she felt a wish to frighten her for the sake of fun. But such reliance did she have in her physique, which had so far proved better than that of others, that little worrying her mind about the cold, she did not even throw a cloak over her, but putting on a short jacket, she descended, with gentle tread and light step, from the warming-frame and was making her way out to follow in her wake, when “Hallo!” cried Pao-yü warning her. “It’s freezing; it’s no joke!”

Ch’ing Wen merely responded with a wave of the hand and sallied out of the door to go in pursuit of her companion. The brilliancy of the moon, which met her eye, was as limpid as water. But suddenly came a slight gust of wind. She felt it penetrate her very flesh and bore through her bones. So much so, that she could not help shuddering all over. “Little wonder is it,” she argued within herself, “if people say ‘that one mustn’t, when one’s body is warm, expose one’s self to the wind.’ This cold is really dreadful!” She was at the same time just on the point of giving (She Yüeh) a start, when she heard Pao-yü shout from inside, “Ch’ing Wen has come out.”

Ch’ing Wen promptly turned back and entered the room. “How could I ever frighten her to death?” she laughed. “It’s just your way; you’re as great a coward as an old woman!”

“It isn’t at all that you might do her harm by frightening her,” Pao-yü smiled, “but, in the first place, it wouldn’t be good for you to get frostbitten; and, in the second, you would take her so much off her guard that she won’t be able to prevent herself from uttering a shout. So, in the event of rousing any of the others out of their sleep, they won’t say that we are up to jokes, but maintain instead that just as Hsi Jen is gone, you two behave as if you’d come across ghosts or seen evil spirits. Come and tuck in the coverlets on this side!”

When Ch’ing Wen heard what he wanted done she came accordingly and tucked in the covers, and, putting out her hands, she inserted them under them, and set

to work to warm the bedding.

“How cold your hand is!” Pao-yü laughingly exclaimed. “I told you to look out or you’d freeze!”

Noticing at the same time that Ch’ing Wen’s cheeks were as red as rouge, he rubbed them with his hands. But as they felt icy cold to his touch, “Come at once under the cover and warm yourself!” Pao-yü urged.

Hardly, however, had he concluded these words, than a sound of ‘lo teng’ reached their ears from the door, and She Yüeh rushed in all in a tremor, laughing the while.

“I’ve had such a fright,” she smiled, as she went on speaking. “Goodness me! I saw in the black shade, at the back of the boulders on that hill, some one squatting, and was about to scream, when it turned out to be nothing else than that big golden pheasant. As soon as it caught sight of a human being, it flew away. But it was only when it reached a moonlit place that I at last found out what it was. Had I been so heedless as to scream, I would have been the means of getting people out of their beds!”

Recounting her experiences, she washed her hands.

“Ch’ing Wen, you say, has gone out,” she proceeded laughing, “but how is it I never caught a glimpse of her? She must certainly have gone to frighten me!”

“Isn’t this she?” Pao-yü inquired with a smile. “Is she not here warming herself? Had I not been quick in shouting, she would verily have given you a fright.”

“There was no need for me to go and frighten her,” Ch’ing Wen laughingly observed. “This hussy has frightened her own self.”

With these words she ensconced herself again under her own coverlet. “Did you forsooth go out,” She Yüeh remarked, “in this smart dress of a circus-performer?”

“Why, of course, she went out like this!” Pao-yü smiled.

“You wouldn’t know, for the life of you, how to choose a felicitous day!” She Yüeh added. “There you go and stand about on a fruitless errand. Won’t your

skin get chapped from the frost?”

Saying this, she again raised the copper cover from the brasier, and, picking up the shovel, she buried the live charcoal deep with ashes, and taking two bits of incense of Cambodia fragrant wood, she threw them over them. She then recovered the brasier, and repairing to the back of the screen, she gave the lamp a thorough trimming to make it throw out more light; after which, she once more laid herself down.

As Ch’ing Wen had some time before felt cold, and now began to get warm again, she unexpectedly sneezed a couple of times.

“How about that?” sighed Pao-yü. “There you are; you’ve after all caught a chill!”

“Early this morning,” She Yüeh smiled, “she shouted that she wasn’t feeling quite herself. Neither did she have the whole day a proper bowl of food. And now, not to speak of her taking so little care of herself, she is still bent upon playing larks upon people! But if she falls ill by and bye, we’ll let her suffer what she will have brought upon herself.”

“Is your head hot?” Pao-yü asked.

“It’s nothing at all!” Ch’ing Wen rejoined, after coughing twice. “When did I get so delicate?”

But while she spoke, they heard the striking clock, suspended on the partition wall in the outer rooms, give two sounds of ‘tang, tang,’ and the matron, on the night watch outside, say: “Now, young girls, go to sleep. Tomorrow will be time enough for you to chat and laugh!”

“Don’t let’s talk!” Pao-yü then whispered, “for, mind, we’ll also induce them to start chattering.” After this, they at last went to sleep.

The next day, they got up at an early hour. Ch’ing Wen’s nose was indeed considerably stopped. Her voice was hoarse; and she felt no inclination to move.

“Be quick,” urged Pao-yü, “and don’t make a fuss, for your mistress, my mother, may come to know of it, and bid you also shift to your house and nurse yourself. Your home might, of course, be all very nice, but it’s in fact somewhat cold. So

isn’t it better here? Go and lie down in the inner rooms, and I’ll give orders to some one to send for the doctor to come quietly by the back door and have a look at you. You’ll then get all right again.”

“In spite of what you say,” Ch’ing Wen demurred, “you must really say something about it to our senior lady, Mrs. Chia Chu; otherwise the doctor will be coming unawares, and people will begin to ask questions; and what answer could one give them?”

Pao-yü found what she said so full of reason that he called an old nurse. “Go and deliver this message to your senior mistress,” he enjoined her. “Tell her that Ch’ing Wen got a slight chill yesterday. That as it’s nothing to speak of, and Hsi Jen is besides away, there would be, more than ever, no one here to look after things, were she to go home and attend to herself, so let her send for a doctor to come quietly by the back entrance and see what’s the matter with her; but don’t let her breathe a word about it to Madame Wang, my mother.”

The old nurse was away a considerable time on the errand. On her return, “Our senior mistress,” she reported, “has been told everything. She says that: ‘if she gets all right, after taking a couple of doses of medicine, it will be well and good. But that in the event of not recovering, it would, really, be the right thing for her to go to her own home. That the season isn’t healthy at present, and that if the other girls caught her complaint it would be a small thing; but that the good health of the young ladies is a vital matter.’”

Ch’ing Wen was lying in the winter apartment, coughing and coughing, when overhearing (Li Wan’s) answer, she lost control over her temper. “Have I got such a dreadful epidemic,” she said, “that she fears that I shall bring it upon others? I’ll clear off at once from this place; for mind you don’t get any headaches and hot heads during the course of your lives.”

“While uttering her grievances, she was bent upon getting up immediately, when Pao-yü hastened to smile and to press her down.

“Don’t lose your temper,” he advised her. “This is a responsibility which falls upon her shoulders, so she is afraid lest Madame Wang might come to hear of it, and call her to task. She only made a harmless remark. But you’ve always been prone to anger, and now, as a matter of course your spleen is larger than ever.”

But in the middle of his advice to her, a servant came and told him that the

doctor had arrived. Pao-yü accordingly crossed over to the off side, and retired behind the bookcase; from whence he perceived two or three matrons, whose duty it was to keep watch at the back door, usher the doctor in.

The waiting-maids, meanwhile, withdrew out of the way. Three or four old nurses dropped the deep-red embroidered curtain, suspended in the winter apartment. Ch'ing Wen then simply stretched out her hand from among the folds of the curtain. But the doctor noticed that on two of the fingers of her hand, the nails, which measured fully two or three inches in length, still bore marks of the pure red dye from the China balsam, and forthwith he turned his head away. An old nurse speedily fetched a towel and wiped them for her, when the doctor set to work and felt her pulse for a while, after which he rose and walked into the outer chamber.

"Your young lady's illness," he said to the old nurses, "arises from external sources, and internal obstructive influences, caused by the unhealthiness of the season of late. Yet it's only a slight chill, after all. Fortunately, the young lady has ever been moderate in her drinking and eating. The cold she has is nothing much. It's mainly because she has a weak constitution that she has unawares got a bit of a chill. But if she takes a couple of doses of medicine to dispel it with, she'll be quite right."

So saying, he followed once more the matron out of the house.

Li Wan had, by this time, sent word to the various female domestics at the back entrance, as well as to the young maids in the different parts of the establishment to keep in retirement. All therefore that the doctor perceived as he went along was the scenery in the garden. But not a single girl did he see.

Shortly, he made his exit out of the garden gate, and taking a seat in the duty-lodge of the servant-lads, who looked after the garden-entrance, he wrote a prescription.

"Sir," urged an old nurse, "don't go yet. Our young master is fretful and there may be, I fancy, something more to ask you."

"Wasn't the one I saw just now a young lady," the doctor exclaimed with eagerness, "but a young man, eh? Yet the rooms were such as are occupied by ladies. The curtains were besides let down. So how could the patient I saw have ever been a young man?"

“My dear sir,” laughed the old nurse, “it isn’t strange that a servant-girl said just now that a new doctor had been sent for on this occasion, for you really know nothing about our family matters. That room is that of our young master, and that is a girl attached to the apartments; but she’s really a servant-maid. How ever were those a young lady’s rooms? Had a young lady fallen ill, would you ever have penetrated inside with such ease?”

With these words, she took the prescription and wended her way into the garden.

When Pao-yü came to peruse it, he found, above, such medicines mentioned as sweet basil, platycodon, carraway seeds, mosla dianthera, and the like; and, below, citrus fusca and sida as well.

“He deserves to be hanged! He deserves death!” Pao-yü shouted. “Here he treats girls in the very same way as he would us men! How could this ever do? No matter what internal obstruction there may be, how could she ever stand citrus and sida? Who asked him to come? Bundle him off at once; and send for another, who knows what he’s about.”

“Whether he uses the right medicines or not,” the old nurse pleaded, “we are not in a position to know. But we’ll now tell a servant-lad to go and ask Dr. Wang round. It’s easy enough! The only thing is that as this doctor wasn’t sent for through the head manager’s office his fee must be paid to him.”

“How much must one give him?” Pao-yü inquired.

“Were one to give him too little, it wouldn’t look nice,” a matron ventured. “He should be given a tael. This would be quite the thing with such a household as ours.”

“When Dr. Wang comes,” Pao-yü asked, “how much is he given?”

“Whenever Dr. Wang and Dr. Chang come,” a matron smilingly explained, “no money is ever given them. At the four seasons of each year however presents are simply sent to them in a lump. This is a fixed annual custom. But this new doctor has come only this once so he should be given a tael.”

After this explanation, Pao-yü readily bade She Yüeh go and fetch the money.

“I can’t make out where sister Hua put it;” She Yüeh rejoined.

“I’ve often seen her take money out of that lacquered press, ornamented with designs made with shells;” Pao-yü added; “so come along with me, and let’s go and search.”

As he spoke, he and She Yüeh came together into what was used as a store-room by Hsi Jen. Upon opening the shell-covered press, they found the top shelf full of pens, pieces of ink, fans, scented cakes, various kinds of purses, handkerchiefs and other like articles, while on the lower shelf were piled several strings of cash. But, presently they pulled out the drawer, when they saw, in a small wicker basket, several pieces of silver, and a steelyard.

She Yüeh quickly snatched a piece of silver. Then raising the steelyard, “Which is the one tael mark?” she asked.

Pao-yü laughed. “It’s amusing that you should appeal to me!” he said. “You really behave as if you had only just come!”

She Yüeh also laughed, and was about to go and make inquiries of some one else, when Pao-yü interfered. “Choose a piece out of those big ones and give it to him, and have done,” he said. “We don’t go in for buying and selling, so what’s the use of minding such trifles!”

She Yüeh, upon hearing this, dropped the steelyard, and selected a piece, which she weighed in her hand. “This piece,” she smiled, “must, I fancy, be a tael. But it would be better to let him have a little more. Don’t let’s give too little as those poor brats will have a laugh at our expense. They won’t say that we know nothing about the steelyard; but that we are designedly mean.”

A matron who stood at the threshold of the door, smilingly chimed in. “This ingot,” she said, “weighs five taels. Even if you cut half of it off, it will weigh a couple of taels, at least. But there are no sycee shears at hand, so, miss, put this piece aside and choose a smaller one.”

She Yüeh had already closed the press and walked out. “Who’ll go and fumble about again?” she laughed. “If there’s a little more, well, you take it and finish.”

“Be quick,” Pao-yü remarked, “and tell Pei Ming to go for another doctor. It will be all right.”

The matron received the money and marched off to go and settle matters.

Presently, Dr. Wang actually arrived, at the invitation of Pei Ming. First and foremost he felt the pulse and then gave the same diagnosis of the complaint (as the other doctor did) in the first instance. The only difference being that there was, in fact, no citrus or sida or other similar drugs, included in the prescription. It contained, however, false sarsaparilla roots, dried orange peel, peonia albifora, and other similar medicines. But the quantities were, on the other hand, considerably smaller, as compared with those of the drugs mentioned in the former prescription.

“These are the medicines,” Pao-yü ejaculated exultingly, “suitable for girls! They should, it’s true, be of a laxative nature, but never over and above what’s needful. When I fell ill last year, I suffered from a chill, but I got such an obstruction in the viscera that I could neither take anything liquid or substantial, yet though he saw the state I was in, he said that I couldn’t stand sida, ground gypsum, citrus and other such violent drugs. You and I resemble the newly-opened white begonia, Yün Erh sent me in autumn. And how could you resist medicines which are too much for me? We’re like the lofty aspen trees, which grow in people’s burial grounds. To look at, the branches and leaves are of luxuriant growth, but they are hollow at the core.”

“Do only aspen trees grow in waste burial grounds?” She Yüeh smiled. “Is it likely, pray, that there are no fir and cypress trees? What’s more loathsome than any other is the aspen. For though a lofty tree, it only has a few leaves; and it makes quite a confused noise with the slightest puff of wind! If you therefore deliberately compare yourself to it, you’ll also be ranging yourself too much among the common herd!”

“I daren’t liken myself to fir or cypress;” Pao-yü laughingly retorted. “Even Confucius says: ‘after the season waxes cold, one finds that the fir and cypress are the last to lose their foliage,’ which makes it evident that these two things are of high excellence. Thus it’s those only, who are devoid of every sense of shame, who foolishly liken themselves to trees of the kind!”

While engaged in this colloquy, they perceived the old matron bring the drugs, so Pao-yü bade her fetch the silver pot, used for boiling medicines in, and then he directed her to prepare the decoction on the brasier.

“The right thing would be,” Ch’ing Wen suggested, “that you should let them go and get it ready in the tea-room; for will it ever do to fill this room with the smell

of medicines?”

“The smell of medicines,” Pao-yü rejoined, “is far nicer than that emitted by the whole lot of flowers. Fairies pick medicines and prepare medicines. Besides this, eminent men and cultured scholars gather medicines and concoct medicines; so that it constitutes a most excellent thing. I was just thinking that there’s everything and anything in these rooms and that the only thing that we lack is the smell of medicines; but as luck would have it, everything is now complete.”

Speaking, he lost no time in giving orders to a servant to put the medicines on the fire. Next, he advised She Yüeh to get ready a few presents and bid a nurse take them and go and look up Hsi Jen, and exhort her not to give way to excessive grief. And when he had settled everything that had to be seen to, he repaired to the front to dowager lady Chia’s and Madame Wang’s quarters, and paid his respects and had his meal.

Lady Feng, as it happened, was just engaged in consulting with old lady Chia and Madame Wang. “The days are now short as well as cold,” she argued, “so wouldn’t it be advisable that my senior sister-in-law, Mrs. Chia Chu, should henceforward have her repasts in the garden, along with the young ladies? When the weather gets milder, it won’t at all matter, if they have to run backward and forward.”

“This is really a capital idea!” Madame Wang smiled. “It will be so convenient during windy and rainy weather. To inhale the chilly air after eating isn’t good. And to come quite empty, and begin piling up a lot of things in a stomach full of cold air isn’t quite safe. It would be as well therefore to select two cooks from among the women, who have, anyhow, to keep night duty in the large five-roomed house, inside the garden back entrance, and station them there for the special purpose of preparing the necessary viands for the girls. Fresh vegetables are subject to some rule of distribution, so they can be issued to them from the general manager’s office. Or they might possibly require money or be in need of some things or other. And it will be all right if a few of those pheasants, deer, and every kind of game, be apportioned to them.”

“I too was just thinking about this,” dowager lady Chia observed. “The only thing I feared was that with the extra work that would again be thrown upon the cook-house, they mightn’t have too much to do.”

“There’ll be nothing much to do,” lady Feng replied. “The same apportionment will continue as ever. In here, something may be added; but in there something will be reduced. Should it even involve a little trouble, it will be a small matter. If the girls were exposed to the cold wind, every one else might stand it with impunity; but how could cousin Lin, first and foremost above all others, resist anything of the kind? In fact, brother Pao himself wouldn’t be proof against it. What’s more, none of the various young ladies can boast of a strong constitution.”

What rejoinder old lady Chia made to lady Feng, at the close of her representations, is not yet ascertained; so, reader, listen to the explanations you will find given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LII.

The beautiful P’ing Erh endeavours to conceal the loss of the bracelet, made of work as fine as the feelers of a shrimp. The brave Ch’ing Wen mends the down-cloak during her indisposition.

But let us return to our story.

“Quite so!” was the reply with which dowager lady Chia (greeted lady Feng’s proposal). “I meant the other day to have suggested this arrangement, but I saw that every one of you had so many urgent matters to attend to, (and I thought) that although you would not presume to bear me a grudge, were several duties now again superadded, you would unavoidably imagine that I only regarded those young grandsons and granddaughters of mine, and had no consideration for any of you, who have to look after the house. But since you make this suggestion yourself, it’s all right.”

And seeing that Mrs. Hsüeh, and ‘sister-in-law’ Li were sitting with her, and that Madame Hsing, and Mrs. Yu and the other ladies, who had also crossed over to pay their respects, had not as yet gone to their quarters, old lady Chia broached the subject with Madame Wang, and the rest of the company. “I’ve never before ventured to give utterance to the remarks that just fell from my lips,” she said, “as first of all I was in fear and trembling lest I should have made that girl Feng

more presumptuous than ever, and next, lest I should have incurred the displeasure of one and all of you. But since you're all here to-day, and every one of you knows what brothers' wives and husbands' sisters mean, is there (I ask) any one besides her as full of forethought?"

Mrs. Hsüeh, 'sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Yu smiled with one consent. "There are indeed but few like her!" they cried. "That of others is simply a conventional 'face' affection, but she is really fond of her husband's sisters and his young brother. In fact, she's as genuinely filial with you, venerable senior."

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head. "Albeit I'm fond of her," she sighed, "I can't, on the other hand, help distrusting that excessive shrewdness of hers, for it isn't a good thing."

"You're wrong there, worthy ancestor," lady Feng laughed with alacrity. "People in the world as a rule maintain that 'too shrewd and clever a person can't, it is feared, live long.' Now what people of the world invariably say people of the world invariably believe. But of you alone, my dear senior, can no such thing be averred or believed. For there you are, ancestor mine, a hundred times sharper and cleverer than I; and how is it that you now enjoy both perfect happiness and longevity? But I presume that I shall by and bye excel you by a hundredfold, and die at length, after a life of a thousand years, when you venerable senior shall have departed from these mortal scenes!"

"After every one is dead and gone," dowager lady Chia laughingly observed, "what pleasure will there be, if two antiquated elves, like you and I will be, remain behind?"

This joke excited general mirth.

But so concerned was Pao-yü about Ch'ing Wen and other matters that he was the first to make a move and return into the garden. On his arrival at his quarters, he found the rooms full of the fragrance emitted by the medicines. Not a soul did he, however, see about. Ch'ing Wen was reclining all alone on the stovecouch. Her face was feverish and red. When he came to touch it, his hand experienced a scorching sensation. Retracing his steps therefore towards the stove, he warmed his hands and inserted them under the coverlet and felt her. Her body as well was as hot as fire.

"If the others have left," he then remarked, "there's nothing strange about it, but

are She Yüeh and Ch’iu Wen too so utterly devoid of feeling as to have each gone after her own business?”

“As regards Ch’iu Wen,” Ch’ing Wen explained, “I told her to go and have her meal. And as for She Yüeh, P’ing Erh came just now and called her out of doors and there they are outside confabbing in a mysterious way! What the drift of their conversation can be I don’t know. But they must be talking about my having fallen ill, and my not leaving this place to go home.”

“P’ing Erh isn’t that sort of person,” Pao-yü pleaded. “Besides, she had no idea whatever about your illness, so that she couldn’t have come specially to see how you were getting on. I fancy her object was to look up She Yüeh to hobnob with her, but finding unexpectedly that you were not up to the mark, she readily said that she had come on purpose to find what progress you were making. This was quite a natural thing for a person with so wily a disposition to say, for the sake of preserving harmony. But if you don’t go home, it’s none of her business. You two have all along been, irrespective of other things, on such good terms that she could by no means entertain any desire to injure the friendly relations which exist between you, all on account of something that doesn’t concern her.”

“Your remarks are right enough,” Ch’ing Wen rejoined, “but I do suspect her, as why did she too start, all of a sudden, imposing upon me?”

“Wait, I’ll walk out by the back door,” Pao-yü smiled, “and go to the foot of the window, and listen to what she’s saying. I’ll then come and tell you.”

Speaking the while, he, in point of fact, sauntered out of the back door; and getting below the window, he lent an ear to their confidences.

“How did you manage to get it?” She Yueh inquired with gentle voice.

“When I lost sight of it on that day that I washed my hands,” P’ing Erh answered, “our lady Secunda wouldn’t let us make a fuss. But the moment she left the garden, she there and then sent word to the nurses, stationed in the various places, to institute careful search. Our suspicions, however, fell upon Miss Hsing’s maid, who has ever also been poverty-stricken; surmising that a young girl of her age, who had never set eyes upon anything of the kind, may possibly have picked it up and taken it. But never did we positively believe that it could be some one from this place of yours! Happily, our lady Secunda wasn’t in the room, when that nurse Sung who is with you here went over, and said,

producing the bracelet, ‘that the young maid, Chui Erh, had stolen it, and that she had detected her, and come to lay the matter before our lady Secunda. I promptly took over the bracelet from her; and recollecting how imperious and exacting Pao-yü is inclined to be, fond and devoted as he is to each and all of you; how the jade which was prigged the other year by a certain Liang Erh, is still, just as the matter has cooled down for the last couple of years, canvassed at times by some people eager to serve their own ends; how some one has now again turned up to purloin this gold trinket; how it was filched, to make matters worse, from a neighbour’s house; how as luck would have it, she took this of all things; and how it happened to be his own servant to give him a slap on his mouth, I hastened to enjoin nurse Sung to, on no account whatever, let Pao-yü know anything about it, but simply pretend that nothing of the kind had transpired, and to make no mention of it to any single soul. In the second place,’ (I said), ‘our dowager lady and Madame Wang would get angry, if they came to hear anything. Thirdly, Hsi Jen as well as yourselves would not also cut a very good figure.’ Hence it was that in telling our lady Secunda, I merely explained ‘that on my way to our senior mistress,’ the bracelet got unclasped, without my knowing it; that it fell among the roots of the grass; that there was no chance of seeing it while the snow was deep, but that when the snow completely disappeared to-day there it glistened, so yellow and bright, in the rays of the sun, in precisely the very place where it had dropped, and that I then picked it up.’ Our lady Secunda at once credited my version. So here I come to let you all know so as to be henceforward a little on your guard with her, and not get her a job anywhere else. Wait until Hsi Jen’s return, and then devise means to pack her off, and finish with her.”

“This young vixen has seen things of this kind before,” She Yüeh ejaculated, “and how is it that she was so shallow-eyed?”

“What could, after all, be the weight of this bracelet?” P’ing Erh observed. “It was once our lady Secunda’s. She says that this is called the ‘shrimp-feeler’-bracelet. But it’s the pearl, which increases its weight. That minx Ch’ing Wen is as fiery as a piece of crackling charcoal, so were anything to be told her, she may, so little able is she to curb her temper, flare up suddenly into a huff, and beat or scold her, and kick up as much fuss as she ever has done before. That’s why I simply tell you. Exercise due care, and it will be all right.”

With this warning, she bid her farewell and went on her way.

Her words delighted, vexed and grieved Pao-yü. He felt delighted, on account of the consideration shown by P'ing Erh for his own feelings. Vexed, because Chui Erh had turned out a petty thief. Grieved, that Chui Erh, who was otherwise such a smart girl, should have gone in for this disgraceful affair. Returning consequently into the house, he told Ch'ing Wen every word that P'ing Erh had uttered. "She says," he went on to add, "that you're so fond of having things all your own way that were you to hear anything of this business, now that you are ill, you would get worse, and that she only means to broach the subject with you, when you get quite yourself again."

Upon hearing this, Ch'ing Wen's ire was actually stirred up, and her beautiful moth-like eyebrows contracted, and her lovely phoenix eyes stared wide like two balls. So she immediately shouted out for Chui Erh.

"If you go on bawling like that," Pao-yü hastily remonstrated with her, "won't you show yourself ungrateful for the regard with which P'ing Erh has dealt with you and me? Better for us to show ourselves sensible of her kindness and by and bye pack the girl off, and finish."

"Your suggestion is all very good," Ch'ing Wen demurred, "but how could I suppress this resentment?"

"What's there to feel resentment about?" Pao-yü asked. "Just you take good care of yourself; it's the best thing you can do."

Ch'ing Wen then took her medicine. When evening came, she had another couple of doses. But though in the course of the night, she broke out into a slight perspiration, she did not see any change for the better in her state. Still she felt feverish, her head sore, her nose stopped, her voice hoarse. The next day, Dr. Wang came again to examine her pulse and see how she was getting on. Besides other things, he increased the proportions of certain medicines in the decoction and reduced others; but in spite of her fever having been somewhat brought down, her head continued to ache as much as ever.

"Go and fetch the snuff," Pao-yü said to She Yüeh, "and give it to her to sniff. She'll feel more at ease after she has had several strong sneezes."

She Yüeh went, in fact, and brought a flat crystal bottle, inlaid with a couple of golden stars, and handed it to Pao-yü.

Pao-yü speedily raised the cover of the bottle. Inside it, he discovered, represented on western enamel, a fair-haired young girl, in a state of nature, on whose two sides figured wings of flesh. This bottle contained some really first-rate foreign snuff.

Ch'ing Wen's attention was fixedly concentrated on the representation.

"Sniff a little!" Pao-yü urged. "If the smell evaporates, it won't be worth anything."

Ch'ing Wen, at his advice, promptly dug out a little with her nail, and applied it to her nose. But with no effect. So digging out again a good quantity of it, she pressed it into her nostrils. Then suddenly she experienced a sensation in her nose as if some pungent matter had penetrated into the very duct leading into the head, and she sneezed five or six consecutive times, until tears rolled down from her eyes and mucus trickled from her nostrils.

Ch'ing Wen hastily put the bottle away. "It's dreadfully pungent!" she laughed. "Bring me some paper, quick!"

A servant-girl at once handed her a pile of fine paper.

Ch'ing Wen extracted sheet after sheet, and blew her nose.

"Well," said Pao-yü smiling, "how are you feeling now?"

"I'm really considerably relieved." Ch'ing Wen rejoined laughing. "The only thing is that my temples still hurt me."

"Were you to treat yourself exclusively with western medicines, I'm sure you'd get all right," Pao-yü added smilingly. Saying this, "Go," he accordingly desired She Yüeh, "to our lady Secunda, and ask her for some. Tell her that I spoke to you about them. My cousin over there often uses some western plaster, which she applies to her temples when she's got a headache. It's called 'I-fo-na.' So try and get some of it!"

She Yüeh expressed her readiness. After a protracted absence, she, in very deed, came back with a small bit of the medicine; and going quickly for a piece of red silk cutting, she got the scissors and slit two round slips off as big as the tip of a finger. After which, she took the medicine, and softening it by the fire, she

spread it on them with a hairpin.

Ch’ing Wen herself laid hold of a looking-glass with a handle and stuck the bits on both her temples.

“While you were lying sick,” She Yüeh laughed, “you looked like a mangy-headed devil! But with this stuff on now you present a fine sight! As for our lady Secunda she has been so much in the habit of sticking these things about her that they don’t very much show off with her!”

This joke over, “Our lady Secunda said,” she resumed, addressing herself to Pao-yü, “‘that tomorrow is your maternal uncle’s birthday, and that our mistress, your mother, asked her to tell you to go over. That whatever clothes you will put on tomorrow should be got ready to-night, so as to avoid any trouble in the morning.’”

“Anything that comes first to hand,” Pao-yü observed, “will do well enough! There’s no getting, the whole year round, at the end of all the fuss of birthdays!”

Speaking the while, he rose to his feet and left the room with the idea of repairing to Hsi Ch’un’s quarters to have a look at the painting. As soon as he got outside the door of the courtyard, he unexpectedly spied Pao-ch’in’s young maid, Hsiao Lo by name, crossing over from the opposite direction. Pao-yü, with rapid step, strode up to her, and inquired of her whither she was going.

“Our two young ladies,” Hsiao Lo answered with a smile, “are in Miss Lin’s rooms; so I’m also now on my way thither.”

Catching this answer, Pao-yü wheeled round and came at once with her to the Hsiao Hsiang Lodge. Here not only did he find Pao-ch’ai and her cousin, but Hsing Chou-yen as well. The quartet was seated in a circle on the warming-frame; carrying on a friendly chat on everyday domestic matters; while Tzu Chüan was sitting in the winter apartment, working at some needlework by the side of the window.

The moment they caught a glimpse of him, their faces beamed with smiles. “There comes some one else!” they cried. “There’s no room for you to sit!”

“What a fine picture of beautiful girls, in the winter chamber!” Pao-yü smiled. “It’s a pity I come a trifle too late! This room is, at all events, so much warmer

than any other, that I won’t feel cold if I plant myself on this chair.”

So saying, he made himself comfortable on a favourite chair of Tai-yü‘s over which was thrown a grey squirrel cover. But noticing in the winter apartment a jadestone bowl, full of single narcissi, in clusters of three or five, Pao-yü began praising their beauty with all the language he could command. “What lovely flowers!” he exclaimed. “The warmer the room gets, the stronger is the fragrance emitted by these flowers! How is it I never saw them yesterday?”

“These are,” Tai-yü laughingly explained, “from the two pots of narcissi, and two pots of allspice, sent to Miss Hsüeh Secunda by the wife of Lai Ta, the head butler in your household. Of these, she gave me a pot of narcissi; and to that girl Yün, a pot of allspice. I didn’t at first mean to keep them, but I was afraid of showing no consideration for her kind attention. But if you want them, I’ll, in my turn, present them to you. Will you have them; eh?”

“I’ve got two pots of them in my rooms,” Pao-yü replied, “but they’re not up to these. How is it you’re ready to let others have what cousin Ch’in has given you? This can on no account do!”

“With me here,” Tai-yü added, “the medicine pot never leaves the fire, the whole day long. I’m only kept together by medicines. So how could I ever stand the smell of flowers bunging my nose? It makes me weaker than ever. Besides, if there’s the least whiff of medicines in this room, it will, contrariwise, spoil the fragrance of these flowers. So isn’t it better that you should have them carried away? These flowers will then breathe a purer atmosphere, and won’t have any mixture of smells to annoy them.”

“I’ve also got now some one ill in my place,” Pao-yü retorted with a smile, “and medicines are being decocted. How comes it you happen to know nothing about it?”

“This is strange!” Tai-yü laughed. “I was really speaking quite thoughtlessly; for who ever knows what’s going on in your apartments? But why do you, instead of getting here a little earlier to listen to old stories, come at this moment to bring trouble and vexation upon your own self?”

Pao-yü gave a laugh. “Let’s have a meeting tomorrow,” he proposed, “for we’ve also got the themes. Let’s sing the narcissus and allspice.”

“Never mind, drop that!” Tai-yü rejoined, upon hearing his proposal. “I can’t venture to write any more verses. Whenever I indite any, I’m mulcted. So I’d rather not be put to any great shame.”

While uttering these words she screened her face with both hands.

“What’s the matter?” Pao-yü smiled. “Why are you again making fun of me? I’m not afraid of any shame, but, lo, you screen your face.”

“The next time,” Pao-ch’ai felt impelled to interpose laughingly, “I convene a meeting, we’ll have four themes for odes and four for songs; and each one of us will have to write four odes and four roundelays. The theme of the first ode will treat of the plan of the great extreme; the rhyme fixed being ‘hsien,’ (first), and the metre consisting of five words in each line. We’ll have to exhaust every one of the rhymes under ‘hsien,’ and mind, not a single one may be left out.”

“From what you say,” Pao-ch’in smilingly observed, “it’s evident that you’re not in earnest, cousin, in setting the club on foot. It’s clear enough that your object is to embarrass people. But as far as the verses go, we could forcibly turn out a few, just by higgledy-piggledy taking several passages from the ‘Canon of Changes,’ and inserting them in our own; but, after all, what fun will there be in that sort of thing? When I was eight years of age, I went with my father to the western seaboard to purchase foreign goods. Who’d have thought it, we came across a girl from the ‘Chen Chen’ kingdom. She was in her eighteenth year, and her features were just like those of the beauties one sees represented in foreign pictures. She had also yellow hair, hanging down, and arranged in endless plaits. Her whole head was ornamented with one mass of cornelian beads, amber, cats’ eyes, and ‘grandmother-green-stone.’ On her person, she wore a chain armour plaited with gold, and a coat, which was up to the very sleeves, embroidered in foreign style. In a belt, she carried a Japanese sword, also inlaid with gold and studded with precious gems. In very truth, even in pictures, there is no one as beautiful as she. Some people said that she was thoroughly conversant with Chinese literature, and could explain the ‘Five classics,’ that she was able to write odes and devise roundelays, and so my father requested an interpreter to ask her to write something. She thereupon wrote an original stanza, which all, with one voice, praised for its remarkable beauty, and extolled for its extraordinary merits.”

“My dear cousin,” eagerly smiled Pao-yü, “produce what she wrote, and let’s

have a look at it."

"It's put away in Nanking;" Pao-ch'in replied with a smile. "So how could I at present go and fetch it?"

Great was Pao-yü's disappointment at this rejoinder. "I've no luck," he cried, "to see anything like this in the world."

Tai-yü laughingly laid hold of Pao-ch'in. "Don't be humbugging us!" she remarked. "I know well enough that you are not likely, on a visit like this, to have left any such things of yours at home. You must have brought them along. Yet here you are now again palming off a fib on us by saying that you haven't got them with you. You people may believe what she says, but I, for my part, don't."

Pao-ch'in got red in the face. Drooping her head against her chest, she gave a faint smile; but she uttered not a word by way of response.

"Really P'in Erh you've got into the habit of talking like this!" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "You're too shrewd by far."

"Bring them along," Tai-yü urged with a smile, "and give us a chance of seeing something and learning something; it won't hurt them."

"There's a whole heap of trunks and baskets," Pao-ch'ai put in laughing, "which haven't been yet cleared away. And how could one tell in which particular one, they're packed up? Wait a few days, and when things will have been put straight a bit, we'll try and find them: and every one of us can then have a look at them; that will be all right. But if you happen to remember the lines," she pursued, speaking to Pao-ch'in, "why not recite them for our benefit?"

"I remember so far that her lines consisted of a stanza with five characters in each line," Pao-ch'ai returned for answer. "For a foreign girl, they're verily very well done."

"Don't begin for a while," Pao-ch'ai exclaimed. "Let me send for Yün Erh, so that she too might hear them."

After this remark, she called Hsiao Lo to her. "Go to my place," she observed, "and tell her that a foreign beauty has come over, who's a splendid hand at

poetry. ‘You, who have poetry on the brain,’ (say to her), ‘are invited to come and see her,’ and then lay hold of this verse-maniac of ours and bring her along.”

Hsiao Lo gave a smile, and went away. After a long time, they heard Hsiang-yün laughingly inquire, “What foreign beauty has come?” But while asking this question, she made her appearance in company with Hsiang Ling.

“We heard your voices long before we caught a glimpse of your persons!” the party laughed.

Pao-ch’in and her companions motioned to her to sit down, and, in due course, she reiterated what she had told them a short while back.

“Be quick, out with it! Let’s hear what it is!” Hsiang-yün smilingly cried.

Pao-ch’in thereupon recited:

Last night in the Purple Chamber I dreamt. This evening on the ‘Shui Kuo’ Isle I sing. The clouds by the isle cover the broad sea. The zephyr from the peaks reaches the woods. The moon has never known present or past. From shallow and deep causes springs love’s fate. When I recall my springs south of the Han, Can I not feel disconsolate at heart?

After listening to her, “She does deserve credit,” they unanimously shouted, “for she really is far superior to us, Chinese though we be.”

But scarcely was this remark out of their lips, when they perceived She Yüeh walk in. “Madame Wang,” she said, “has sent a servant to inform you, Master Secundus, that ‘you are to go at an early hour tomorrow morning to your maternal uncle’s, and that you are to explain to him that her ladyship isn’t feeling quite up to the mark, and that she cannot pay him a visit in person.’”

Pao-yü precipitately jumped to his feet (out of deference to his mother), and signified his assent, by answering ‘Yes.’ He then went on to inquire of Pao-ch’ai and Pao-ch’in, “Are you two going?”

“We’re not going,” Pao-ch’ai rejoined. “We simply went there yesterday to take our presents over but we left after a short chat.”

Pao-yü thereupon pressed his female cousins to go ahead and he then followed

them. But Tai-yü called out to him again and stopped him. “When is Hsi Jen, after all, coming back?” she asked.

“She’ll naturally come back after she has accompanied the funeral,” Pao-yü retorted.

Tai-yü had something more she would have liked to tell him, but she found it difficult to shape it into words. After some moments spent in abstraction, “Off with you!” she cried.

Pao-yü too felt that he treasured in his heart many things he would fain confide to her, but he did not know what to bring to his lips, so after cogitating within himself for a time, he likewise observed smilingly: “We’ll have another chat tomorrow,” and, as he said so, he wended his way down the stairs. Lowering his head, he was just about to take a step forward, when he twisted himself round again with alacrity. “Now that the nights are longer than they were, you’re sure to cough often and wake several times in the night; eh?” he asked.

“Last night,” Tai-yü answered, “I was all right; I coughed only twice. But I only slept at the fourth watch for a couple of hours and then I couldn’t close my eyes again.”

“I really have something very important to tell you,” Pao-yü proceeded with another smile. “It only now crossed my mind.” Saying this, he approached her and added in a confidential tone: “I think that the birds’ nests sent to you by cousin Pao-chai….”

Barely, however, had he had time to conclude than he spied dame Chao enter the room to pay Tai-yü a visit. “Miss, have you been all right these last few days?” she inquired.

Tai-yü readily guessed that this was an attention extended to her merely as she had, on her way back from T’an Ch’un’s quarters, to pass by her door, so speedily smiling a forced smile, she offered her a seat.

“Many thanks, dame Chao,” she said, “for the trouble of thinking of me, and for coming in person in this intense cold.”

Hastily also bidding a servant pour the tea, she simultaneously winked at Pao-yü.

Pao-yü grasped her meaning, and forthwith quitted the apartment. As this happened to be about dinner time, and he had been enjoined as well by Madame Wang to be back at an early hour, Pao-yü returned to his quarters, and looked on while Ch'ing Wen took her medicine. Pao-yü did not desire Ch'ing Wen this evening to move into the winter apartment, but stayed with Ch'ing Wen outside; and, giving orders to bring the warming-frame near the winter apartment, She Yueh slept on it.

Nothing of any interest worth putting on record transpired during the night. On the morrow, before the break of day, Ch'ing Wen aroused She Yueh.

"You should awake," she said. "The only thing is that you haven't had enough sleep. If you go out and tell them to get the water for tea ready for him, while I wake him, it will be all right."

She Yueh immediately jumped up and threw something over her. "Let's call him to get up and dress in his fine clothes." she said. "We can summon them in, after this fire-box has been removed. The old nurses told us not to allow him to stay in this room for fear the virus of the disease should pass on to him; so now if they see us bundled up together in one place, they're bound to kick up another row."

"That's my idea too," Ch'ing Wen replied.

The two girls were then about to call him, when Pao-yü woke up of his own accord, and speedily leaping out of bed, he threw his clothes over him.

She Yüeh first called a young maid into the room and put things shipshape before she told Ch'in Wen and the other servant-girls to enter; and along with them, she remained in waiting upon Pao-yü while he combed his hair, and washed his face and hands. This part of his toilet over, She Yüeh remarked: "It's cloudy again, so I suppose it's going to snow. You'd better therefore wear a woollen overcoat!"

Pao-yü nodded his head approvingly; and set to work at once to effect the necessary change in his costume. A young waiting-maid then presented him a covered bowl, in a small tea tray, containing a decoction made of Fu-kien lotus and red dates. After Pao-yü had had a couple of mouthfuls, She Yüeh also brought him a small plateful of brown ginger, prepared according to some prescription. Pao-yü put a piece into his mouth, and, impressing some advice on Ch'ing 'Wen, he crossed over to dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms.

His grandmother had not yet got out of bed. But she was well aware that Pao-yü was going out of doors so having the entrance leading into her bedroom opened she asked Pao-yü to walk in. Pao-yü espied behind the old lady, Pao-ch'in lying with her face turned towards the inside, and not awake yet from her sleep.

Dowager lady Chia observed that Pao-yü was clad in a deep-red felt fringed overcoat, with woollen lichee-coloured archery-sleeves and with an edging of dark green glossy satin, embroidered with gold rings. "What!" old lady Chia inquired, "is it snowing?"

"The weather is dull," Pao-yü replied, "but it isn't snowing yet."

Dowager lady Chia thereupon sent for Yüan Yang and told her to fetch the peacock down pelisse, finished the day before, and give it to him. Yüan Yang signified her obedience and went off, and actually returned with what was wanted.

When Pao-yü came to survey it, he found that the green and golden hues glistened with bright lustre, that the jadelike variegated colours on it shone with splendour, and that it bore no resemblance to the duck-down coat, which Pao-ch'in had been wearing.

"This," he heard his grandmother smilingly remark, "is called 'bird gold'. This is woven of the down of peacocks, caught in Russia, twisted into thread. The other day, I presented that one with the wild duck down to your young female cousin, so I now give you this one."

Pao-yü prostrated himself before her, after which he threw the coat over his shoulders.

"Go and let your mother see it before you start," his grandmother laughingly added.

Pao-yü assented, and quitted her apartments, when he caught sight of Yüan Yang standing below rubbing her eyes. Ever since the day on which Yüan Yang had sworn to have done with the match, she had not exchanged a single word with Pao-yü. Pao-yü was therefore day and night a prey to dejection. So when he now observed her shirk his presence again, Pao-yü at once advanced up to her, and, putting on a smile, "My dear girl," he said, "do look at the coat I've got on. Is it nice or not?"

Yüan Yang shoved his hand away, and promptly walked into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

Pao-yü was thus compelled to repair to Madame Wang's room, and let her see his coat. Retracing afterwards his footsteps into the garden, he let Ch'ing Wen and She Yüeh also have a look at it, and then came and told his grandmother that he had attended to her wishes.

"My mother," he added, "has seen what I've got on. But all she said was: 'what a pity!' and then she went on to enjoin me to be 'careful with it and not to spoil it.'"

"There only remains this single one," old lady Chia observed, "so if you spoil it you can't have another. Even did I want to have one made for you like it now, it would be out of the question."

At the close of these words, she went on to advise him. "Don't," she said, "have too much wine and come back early." Pao-yü acquiesced by uttering several yes's.

An old nurse then followed him out into the pavilion. Here they discovered six attendants, (that is), Pao-yü's milk-brother Li Kuei, and Wang Ho-jung, Chang Jo-chin, Chao I-hua, Ch'ien Ch'i, and Chou Jui, as well as four young servant-lads: Pei Ming, Pan Ho, Chu Shao and Sao Hung; some carrying bundles of clothes on their backs, some holding cushions in their hands, others leading a white horse with engraved saddle and variegated bridles. They had already been waiting for a good long while. The old nurse went on to issue some directions, and the six servants, hastily expressing their obedience by numerous yes's, quickly caught hold of the saddle and weighed the stirrup down while Pao-yü mounted leisurely. Li Kuei and Wang Ho-jung then led the horse by the bit. Two of them, Ch'ien Ch'i and Chou Jui, walked ahead and showed the way. Chang Jo-chin and Chao I-hua followed Pao-yü closely on each side.

"Brother Chou and brother Ch'ien," Pao-yü smiled, from his seat on his horse, "let's go by this side-gate. It will save my having again to dismount, when we reach the entrance to my father's study."

"Mr. Chia Cheng is not in his study," Chou Jui laughed, with a curtsey. "It has been daily under lock and key, so there will be no need for you, master, to get down from your horse."

“Though it be locked up,” Pao-yü smiled, “I shall have to dismount all the same.”

“You’re quite right in what you say, master;” both Ch’ien Ch’i and Li Kuei chimed in laughingly; “but pretend you’re lazy and don’t get down. In the event of our coming across Mr. Lai Ta and our number two Mr. Lin, they’re sure, rather awkward though it be for them to say anything to their master, to tender you one or two words of advice, but throw the whole of the blame upon us. You can also tell them that we had not explained to you what was the right thing to do.”

Chou Jui and Ch’ien Ch’i accordingly wended their steps straight for the side-gate. But while they were keeping up some sort of conversation, they came face to face with Lai Ta on his way in.

Pao-yü speedily pulled in his horse, with the idea of dismounting. But Lai Ta hastened to draw near and to clasp his leg. Pao-yü stood up on his stirrup, and, putting on a smile, he took his hand in his, and made several remarks to him.

In quick succession, he also perceived a young servant-lad make his appearance inside leading the way for twenty or thirty servants, laden with brooms and dust-baskets. The moment they espied Pao-yü, they, one and all, stood along the wall, and dropped their arms against their sides, with the exception of the head lad, who bending one knee, said: “My obeisance to you, sir.”

Pao-yü could not recall to mind his name or surname, but forcing a faint smile, he nodded his head to and fro. It was only when the horse had well gone past, that the lad eventually led the bevy of servants off, and that they went after their business.

Presently, they egressed from the side-gate. Outside, stood the servant-lads of the six domestics, Li Kuei and his companions, as well as several grooms, who had, from an early hour, got ready about ten horses and been standing, on special duty, waiting for their arrival. As soon as they reached the further end of the side-gate, Li Kuei and each of the other attendants mounted their horses, and pressed ahead to lead the way. Like a streak of smoke, they got out of sight, without any occurrence worth noticing.

Ch’ing Wen, meanwhile, continued to take her medicines. But still she experienced no relief in her ailment. Such was the state of exasperation into

which she worked herself that she abused the doctor right and left. “All he’s good for,” she cried, “is to squeeze people’s money. But he doesn’t know how to prescribe a single dose of efficacious medicine for his patients.”

“You have far too impatient a disposition!” She Yüeh said, as she advised her, with a smile. “‘A disease,’ the proverb has it, ‘comes like a crumbling mountain, and goes like silk that is reeled.’ Besides, they’re not the divine pills of ‘Lao Chün’. How ever could there be such efficacious medicines? The only thing for you to do is to quietly look after yourself for several days, and you’re sure to get all right. But the more you work yourself into such a frenzy, the worse you get!”

Ch’ing Weng went on to heap abuse on the head of the young-maids. “Where have they gone? Have they bored into the sand?” she ejaculated. “They see well enough that I’m ill, so they make bold and runaway. But by and bye when I recover, I shall take one by one of you and flay your skin off for you.”

Ting Erh, a young maid, was struck with dismay, and ran up to her with hasty step. “Miss,” she inquired, “what’s up with you?”

“Is it likely that the rest are all dead and gone, and that there only remains but you?” Ch’ing Wen exclaimed.

But while she spoke, she saw Chui Erh also slowly enter the room.

“Look at this vixen!” Ch’ing Wen shouted. “If I don’t ask for her, she won’t come. Had there been any monthly allowances issued and fruits distributed here, you would have been the first to run in! But approach a bit! Am I tigress to gobble you up?”

Chui Erh was under the necessity of advancing a few steps nearer to her. But, all of a sudden, Ch’ing Wen stooped forward, and with a dash clutching her hand, she took a long pin from the side of her pillow, and pricked it at random all over.

“What’s the use of such paws?” she railed at her. “They don’t ply a needle, and they don’t touch any thread! All you’re good for is to prig things to stuff that mouth of yours with! The skin of your phiz is shallow and those paws of yours are light! But with the shame you bring upon yourself before the world, isn’t it right that I should prick you, and make mincemeat of you?”

Chui Erh shouted so wildly from pain that She Yueh stepped forward and

immediately drew them apart. She then pressed Ch'ing Wen, until she induced her to lie down.

"You're just perspiring," she remarked, "and here you are once more bent upon killing yourself. Wait until you are yourself again! Won't you then be able to give her as many blows as you may like? What's the use of kicking up all this fuss just now?"

Ch'ing Wen bade a servant tell nurse Sung to come in. "Our master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, recently asked me to tell you," she remarked on her arrival, "that Chui Erh is very lazy. He himself gives her orders to her very face, but she is ever ready to raise objections and not to budge. Even when Hsi Jen bids her do things, she vilifies her behind her back. She must absolutely therefore be packed off to-day. And if Mr. Pao himself lays the matter tomorrow before Madame Wang, things will be square."

After listening to her grievances, nurse Sung readily concluded in her mind that the affair of the bracelet had come to be known. "What you suggest is well and good, it's true," she consequently smiled, "but it's as well to wait until Miss Hua (flower) returns and hears about the things. We can then give her the sack."

"Mr. Pao-yü urgently enjoined this to-day," Ch'ing Wen pursued, "so what about Miss Hua (flower) and Miss Ts'ao (grass)? We've, of course, gob rules of propriety here, so you just do as I tell you; and be quick and send for some one from her house to come and fetch her away!"

"Well, now let's drop this!" She Yüeh interposed. "Whether she goes soon or whether she goes late is one and the same thing; so let them take her away soon; we'll then be the sooner clear of her."

At these words, nurse Sung had no alternative but to step out, and to send for her mother. When she came, she got ready all her effects, and then came to see Ch'ing Wen and the other girls. "Young ladies," she said, "what's up? If your niece doesn't behave as she ought to, why, call her to account. But why banish her from this place? You should, indeed, leave us a little face!"

"As regards what you say," Ch'ing Wen put in, "wait until Pao-yü comes, and then we can ask him. It's nothing to do with us."

The woman gave a sardonic smile. "Have I got the courage to ask him?" she

answered. “In what matter doesn’t he lend an ear to any settlement you, young ladies, may propose? He invariably agrees to all you say! But if you, young ladies, aren’t agreeable, it’s really of no avail. When you, for example, spoke just now,—it’s true it was on the sly,—you called him straightway by his name, miss. This thing does very well with you, young ladies, but were we to do anything of the kind, we’d be looked upon as very savages!”

Ch’ing Wen, upon hearing her remark, became more than ever exasperated, and got crimson in the face. “Yes, I called him by his name,” she rejoined, “so you’d better go and report me to our old lady and Madame Wang. Tell them I’m a rustic and let them send me too off.”

“Sister-in-law,” urged She Yüeh, “just you take her away; and if you’ve got aught to say, you can say it by and bye. Is this a place for you to bawl in and to try and explain what is right? Whom have you seen discourse upon the rules of propriety with us? Not to speak of you, sister-in-law, even Mrs. Lai Ta and Mrs. Lin treat us fairly well. And as for calling him by name, why, from days of yore to the very present, our dowager mistress has invariably bidden us do so. You yourselves are well aware of it. So much did she fear that it would be a difficult job to rear him that she deliberately wrote his infant name on slips of paper and had them stuck everywhere and anywhere with the design that one and all should call him by it. And this in order that it might exercise a good influence upon his bringing up. Even water-coolies and scavenger-coolies indiscriminately address him by his name; and how much more such as we? So late, in fact, as yesterday Mrs. Lin gave him but once the title of ‘Sir,’ and our old mistress called even her to task. This is one side of the question. In the next place, we all have to go and make frequent reports to our venerable dowager lady and Madame Wang, and don’t we with them allude to him by name in what we have to say? Is it likely we’d also style him ‘Sir?’ What day is there that we don’t utter the two words ‘Pao-yü’ two hundred times? And is it for you, sister-in-law, to come and pick out this fault? But in a day or so, when you’ve leisure to go to our old mistress’ and Madame Wang’s, you’ll hear us call him by name in their very presence, and then you’ll feel convinced. You’ve never, sister-in-law, had occasion to fulfil any honourable duties by our old lady and our lady. From one year’s end to the other, all you do is to simply loaf outside the third door. So it’s no matter of surprise, if you don’t happen to know anything of the customs which prevail with us inside. But this isn’t a place where you, sister-in-law, can linger for long. In another moment, there won’t be any need for us to say anything; for some one will be coming to ask you what you want, and what excuse will you be able to plead? So

take her away and let Mrs. Lin know about it; and commission her to come and find our Mr. Secundus and tell him all. There are in this establishment over a thousand inmates; one comes and another comes, so that though we know people and inquire their names, we can't nevertheless imprint them clearly on our minds."

At the close of this long rigmarole, she at once told a young maid to take the mop and wash the floors.

The woman listened patiently to her arguments, but she could find no words to say anything to her by way of reply. Nor did she have the audacity to protract her stay. So flying into a huff, she took Chui Erh along with her, and there and then made her way out.

"Is it likely," nurse Sung hastily observed, "that a dame like you doesn't know what manners mean? Your daughter has been in these rooms for some time, so she should, when she is about to go, knock her head before the young ladies. She has no other means of showing her gratitude. Not that they care much about such things. Yet were she to simply knock her head, she would acquit herself of a duty, if nothing more. But how is it that she says I'm going, and off she forthwith rushes?"

Chui Erh overheard these words, and felt under the necessity of turning back. Entering therefore the apartment, she prostrated herself before the two girls, and then she went in quest of Ch'iu Wen and her companions, but neither did they pay any notice whatever to her.

"Hai!" ejaculated the woman, and heaving a sigh—for she did not venture to utter a word,—she walked off, fostering a grudge in her heart.

Ch'ing Wen had, while suffering from a cold, got into a fit of anger into the bargain, so instead of being better, she was worse, and she tossed and rolled until the time came for lighting the lamps. But the moment she felt more at ease, she saw Pao-yü come back. As soon as he put his foot inside the door, he gave way to an exclamation, and stamped his foot.

"What's the reason of such behaviour?" She Yüeh promptly asked him.

"My old grandmother," Pao-yü explained, "was in such capital spirits that she gave me this coat to-day; but, who'd have thought it, I inadvertently burnt part of

the back lapel. Fortunately however the evening was advanced so that neither she nor my mother noticed what had happened."

Speaking the while, he took it off. She Yüeh, on inspection, found indeed a hole burnt in it of the size of a finger. "This," she said, "must have been done by some spark from the hand-stove. It's of no consequence."

Immediately she called a servant to her. "Take this out on the sly," she bade her, "and let an experienced weaver patch it. It will be all right then."

So saying, she packed it up in a wrapper, and a nurse carried it outside.

"It should be ready by daybreak," she urged. "And by no means let our old lady or Madame Wang know anything about it."

The matron brought it back again, after a protracted absence. "Not only," she explained; "have weavers, first-class tailors, and embroiderers, but even those, who do women's work, been asked about it, and they all have no idea what this is made of. None of them therefore will venture to undertake the job."

"What's to be done?" She Yüeh inquired. "But it won't matter if you don't wear it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is the very day of the anniversary," Pao-yü rejoined. "Grandmother and my mother bade me put this on and go and pay my visit; and here I go and burn it, on the first day I wear it. Now isn't this enough to throw a damper over my good cheer?"

Ch'ing Wen lent an ear to their conversation for a long time, until unable to restrain herself, she twisted herself round. "Bring it here," she chimed in, "and let me see it! You haven't been lucky in wearing this; but never mind!"

These words were still on Ch'ing Wen's lips, when the coat was handed to her. The lamp was likewise moved nearer to her. With minute care she surveyed it. "This is made," Ch'ing Wen observed, "of gold thread, spun from peacock's feathers. So were we now to also take gold thread, twisted from the feathers of the peacock, and darn it closely, by imitating the woof, I think it will pass without detection."

"The peacock-feather-thread is ready at hand," She Yüeh remarked smilingly.

“But who’s there, exclusive of you, able to join the threads?”

“I’ll, needless to say, do my level best to the very cost of my life and finish,” Ch’ing Wen added.

“How ever could this do?” Pao-yü eagerly interposed. “You’re just slightly better, and how could you take up any needlework?”

“You needn’t go on in this chicken-hearted way!” Ch’ing Wen cried. “I know my own self well enough.”

With this reply, she sat up, and, putting her hair up, she threw something over her shoulders. Her head felt heavy; her body light. Before her eyes, confusedly flitted golden stirs. In real deed, she could not stand the strain. But when inclined to give up the work, she again dreaded that Pao-yü would be driven to despair. She therefore had perforce to make a supreme effort and, setting her teeth to, she bore the exertion. All the help she asked of She Yüeh was to lend her a hand in reeling the thread.

Ch’ing Wen first took hold of a thread, and put it side by side (with those in the pelisse) to compare the two together. “This,” she remarked, “isn’t quite like them; but when it’s patched up with it, it won’t show very much.”

“It will do very well,” Pao-yü said. “Could one also go and hunt up a Russian tailor?”

Ch’ing Wen commenced by unstitching the lining, and, inserting under it, a bamboo bow, of the size of the mouth of a tea cup, she bound it tight at the back. She then turned her mind to the four sides of the aperture, and these she loosened by scratching them with a golden knife. Making next two stitches across with her needle, she marked out the warp and woof; and, following the way the threads were joined, she first and foremost connected the foundation, and then keeping to the original lines, she went backwards and forwards mending the hole; passing her work, after every second stitch, under further review. But she did not ply her needle three to five times, before she lay herself down on her pillow, and indulged in a little rest.

Pao-yü was standing by her side. Now he inquired of her: “Whether she would like a little hot water to drink.” Later on, he asked her to repose herself. Now he seized a grey-squirrel wrapper and threw it over her shoulders. Shortly after, he

took a pillow and propped her up. (The way he fussed) so exasperated Ch'ing Wen that she begged and entreated him to leave off.

"My junior ancestor!" she exclaimed, "do go to bed and sleep! If you sit up for the other half of the night, your eyes will tomorrow look as if they had been scooped out, and what good will possibly come out of that?"

Pao-yü realised her state of exasperation and felt compelled to come and lie down anyhow. But he could not again close his eyes.

In a little while, she heard the clock strike four, and just managing to finish she took a small tooth-brush, and rubbed up the pile.

"That will do!" She Yüeh put in. "One couldn't detect it, unless one examined it carefully."

Pao-yü asked with alacrity to be allowed to have a look at it. "Really," he smiled, "it's quite the same thing."

Ch'ing Wen coughed and coughed time after time, so it was only after extreme difficulty that she succeeded in completing what she had to patch. "It's mended, it's true," she remarked, "but it does not, after all, look anything like it. Yet, I cannot stand the effort any more!"

As she shouted 'Ai-ya,' she lost control over herself, and dropped down upon the bed.

But, reader, if you choose to know anything more of her state, peruse the next chapter.

CHAPTER LIII.

In the Ning Kuo mansion sacrifices are offered to their ancestors on the last night of the year. In the Jung Kuo mansion, a banquet is given on the evening of the 15th of the first moon.

But to resume our story. When Pao-yü saw that Ch'ing Wen had in her attempt to finish mending the peacock-down cloak exhausted her strength and fatigued herself, he hastily bade a young maid help him massage her; and setting to work they tapped her for a while, after which, they retired to rest. But not much time elapsed before broad daylight set in. He did not however go out of doors, but simply called out that they should go at once and ask the doctor round.

Presently, Dr. Wang arrived. After feeling her pulse, his suspicions were aroused. "Yesterday," he said, "she was much better, so how is it that to-day she is instead weaker, and has fallen off so much? She must surely have had too much in the way of drinking or eating! Or she must have fatigued herself. A complaint arising from outside sources is, indeed, a light thing. But it's no small matter if one doesn't take proper care of one's self, as she has done after perspiring."

As he passed these remarks, he walked out of the apartment, and, writing a prescription, he entered again.

When Pao-yü came to examine it, he perceived that he had eliminated the laxatives, and all the drugs, whose properties were to expel noxious influences, but added pachyma cocos, rhubarb, arolia edulis, and other such medicines, which could stimulate the system and strengthen her physique.

Pao-yü, on one hand, hastened to direct a servant to go and decoct them, and, on the other, he heaved a sigh. "What's to be done?" he exclaimed. "Should anything happen to her, it will all be through the evil consequences of my shortcomings!"

"Hai!" cried Ch'ing Wen, from where she was reclining on her pillow. "Dear Mr. Secundus, go and mind your own business! Have I got such a dreadful disease?"

Pao-yü had no alternative but to get out of the way. But in the afternoon, he gave out that he was not feeling up to the mark, and hurried back to her side again.

The symptoms of Ch'ing Wen's illness were, it is true, grave; yet fortunately for her she had ever had to strain her physical strength, and not to tax the energies of her mind. Furthermore, she had always been frugal in her diet, so that she had never sustained any harm from under or over-eating. The custom in the Chia mansion was that as soon as any one, irrespective of masters or servants, contracted the slightest chill or cough, quiet and starving should invariably be the main things observed, the treatment by medicines occupying only a secondary place. Hence it was that when the other day she unawares felt unwell, she at once abstained from food during two or three days, while she carefully also nursed herself by taking proper medicines. And although she recently taxed her strength a little too much, she gradually succeeded, by attending with extra care to her health for another few days, in bringing about her complete recovery.

Of late, his female cousins, who lived in the garden, had been having their meals in their rooms, so with the extreme convenience of having a fire to prepare drinks and eatables, Pao-yü himself was able, needless for us to go into details, to ask for soups and order broths for (Ch'ing Wen), with which to recoup her health.

Hsi Jen returned soon after she had followed the funeral of her mother. She Yüeh then minutely told Hsi Jen all about Chui Erh's affair, about Ch'ing Wen having sent her off, and about Pao-yü having been already informed of the fact, and so forth, yet to all this Hsi Jen made no further comment than: "what a very hasty disposition (that girl Ch'ing Wen has!)."

But consequent upon Li Wan being likewise laid up with a cold, she got through the inclemency of the weather; Madame Hsing suffering so much from sore eyes that Ying Ch'un and Chou-yen had to go morning and evening and wait on her, while she used such medicines as she had; Li Wan's brother, having also taken her sister-in-law Li, together with Li Wen and Li Ch'i, to spend a few days at his home, and Pao-yü seeing, on one hand, Hsi Jen brood without intermission over the memory of her mother, and give way to secret grief, and Ch'ing Wen, on the other, continue not quite convalescent, there was no one to turn any attention to such things as poetical meetings, with the result that several occasions, on which they were to have assembled, were passed over without anything being done. By this time, the twelfth moon arrived. The end of the year was nigh at hand, so Madame Wang and lady Feng were engaged in making the necessary annual preparations. But, without alluding to Wang Tzu-t'eng, who was promoted to be Lord High Commissioner of the Nine Provinces; Chia Yü-ts'un, who filled up

the post of Chief Inspector of Cavalry, Assistant Grand Councillor, and Commissioner of Affairs of State, we will resume our narrative with Chia Chen, in the other part of the establishment. After having the Ancestral Hall thrown open, he gave orders to the domestics to sweep the place, to get ready the various articles, and bring over the ancestral tablets. Then he had the upper rooms cleaned, so as to be ready to receive the various images that were to be hung about. In the two mansions of Ning and Jung, inside as well as outside, above as well as below, everything was, therefore, bustle and confusion. As soon as Mrs. Yu, of the Ning mansion, put her foot out of bed on this day, she set to work, with the assistance of Chia Jung's wife, to prepare such needlework and presents as had to be sent over to dowager lady Chia's portion of the establishment, when it so happened that a servant-girl broke in upon them with a tea-tray in hand, containing ingots of silver of the kind given the evening before new year.

"Hsing Erh," she said, "informs your ladyship that the pieces of gold in that bundle of the other day amount in all to one hundred and fifty-three taels, one mace and seven candareens; and that the ingots of pure metal and those not, contained in here, number all together two hundred and twenty."

With these words, she presented the tray. Mrs. Yu passed the ingots under survey. She found some resembling plum-blossom; others peonies. Among them were some with pens and 'as you like,' (importing "your wishes are bound to be fulfilled);" and others representing the eight precious things linked together, for use in springtime.

Mrs. Yu directed that the silver ingots should be made up into a parcel, and then she bade Hsing Erh take them and deliver them immediately inside.

The servant-girl signified her obedience, and went away. But shortly Chia Chen arrived for his meal, and Chia Jung's wife withdrew.

"Have we received," thereupon inquired Chia Chen, "the bounty conferred (by His Majesty) for our spring sacrifices or not?"

"I've sent Jung Erh to-day to go and receive it," Mrs. Yu rejoined.

"Albeit," continued Chia Chen, "our family can well do without those paltry taels, yet they are, whatever their amount may be, an imperial gift to us so take them over as soon as you can, and send them to our old lady, on the other side, to

get ready the sacrifices to our ancestors. Above, we shall then receive the Emperor's bounty; below, we shall enjoy the goodwill of our progenitors. For no matter if we went so far as to spend ten thousand ounces of silver to present offerings to our forefathers with, they could not, in the long run, come up this gift in high repute. Added to this, we shall be the participators of grace and the recipients of blessings. Putting one or two households such as our own aside, what resources would those poverty-stricken families of hereditary officials have at their command wherewith to offer their sacrifices and celebrate the new year, if they could not rely upon this money? In very truth, therefore, the imperial favour is vast, and allproviding!"

"Your arguments are quite correct!" Mrs. Yu ventured.

But while these two were indulging in this colloquy, they caught sight of a messenger, who came and announced: "Our young master has arrived."

Chia Chen accordingly enjoined that he should be told to enter; whereupon they saw Chia Jung step into the room and present with both hands a small bag made of yellow cloth.

"How is it you've been away the whole day?" Chia Chen asked.

Chia Jung strained a smile. "I didn't receive the money to-day from the Board of Rites," he replied. "The issue was again made at the treasury of the Kuang Lu temple; so I had once more to trudge away to the Kuang Lu temple before I could get it. The various officials in the Kuang Lu temple bade me present their compliments to you, father. (They asked me to tell you) that they had not seen you for many days, and that they are really longing for your company."

"What an idea! Do they care to see me?" Chia Chen laughed. "Why, here's the end of the year drawing nigh again; so if they don't hanker after my presents, they must long and crave for my entertainments."

While he spoke his eye espied a slip of paper affixed to the yellow cloth bag, bearing the four large characters, 'the imperial favour is everlasting.' On the other side figured also a row of small characters with the seal of the Director of Ancestral Worship in the Board of Rites. These testified that the enclosed consisted of two shares, conferred upon the Ning Kuo duke, Chia Yen, and the Jung Kuo duke, Chia Fa, as a bounty (from the Emperor), for sacrifices to them every spring in perpetuity, (and gave) the number of taels, computed in pure

silver, and the year, moon and day, on which they were received in open hall by Chia Jung, Controller in the Imperial Prohibited City and Expectant Officer of the Guards. The signature of the official in charge of the temple for that year was appended below in purple ink.

After Chia Chen had perused the inscription, he finished his meal, rinsed his mouth and washed his hands. This over, he changed his shoes and hat, and bidding Chia Jung follow him along with the money, he went and informed dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang (of the receipt of the imperial bounty), and repairing back to the near side, he communicated the fact to Chia She and Madame Hsing; after which, he, at length, betook himself to his quarters. He then emptied the money and gave orders that the bag should be taken and burnt in the large censer in the Ancestral Hall.

“Go and ask your aunt Tertia, yonder,” he further enjoined Chia Jung, “whether the day on which the new year wine is to be drunk has been fixed or not? If it has been determined upon, timely notice should be given in the library to draw out a proper list in order that when we again issue our invitations, there should be no chance of two entertainments coming off on the same day. Last year, not sufficient care was exercised, and several persons were invited to both mansions on the very same occasion. And people didn’t say that we hadn’t been careful enough, but that, as far as appearances went, the two households had made up their minds among themselves to show an empty attention, prompted by the fear of trouble.”

Chia Jung immediately replied that he would attend to his injunctions, and not much time elapsed before he brought a list mentioning the days on which the inmates were to be invited to partake of the new year wine.

Chia Chen examined it. “Go,” he then said, “and give it to Lai Sheng so that he may see its contents and invite the guests. But mind he doesn’t fix anything else for the dates specified in here.”

But while watching from the pavilion the servant-boys carrying the enclosing screens and rubbing the tables and the gold and silver sacrificial utensils, he perceived a lad appear on the scene holding a petition and a list, and report that ‘Wu, the head-farmer in the Hei Shan village, had arrived.’ “What does this old executioner come for to-day?” Chia Chen exclaimed.

Chia Jung took the petition and the list, and, unfolding them with all despatch, he held them up (to his father). Chia Chen however glanced at the papers, as they were held by Chia Jung, keeping the while both hands behind his back. The petition on red paper ran as follows: “Your servant, the head farmer, Wu Chin-hsiao, prostrates himself before his master and mistress and wishes them every kind of happiness and good health, as well as good health to their worthy scion and daughter. May great joy, great blessings, brilliant honours and peace be their share in this spring, which is about to dawn! May official promotion and increase of emoluments be their lot! May they see in everything the accomplishment of their wishes.”

Chia Chen smiled. “For a farmer,” he remarked, “it has several good points!”

“Pay no heed to the style,” urged Chia Jung, also smiling; “but to the good wishes.”

Saying this, he speedily opened the list. The articles mentioned were, on examination, found to consist of: “Thirty big deer; five thousand musk deer; fifty roebuck deer; twenty Siamese pigs; twenty boiled pigs; twenty ‘dragon’ pigs; twenty wild pigs; twenty home-salted pigs; twenty wild sheep; twenty grey sheep; twenty home-boiled sheep; twenty home-dried sheep; two hundred sturgeon; two hundred catties of mixed fish; live chickens, ducks and geese, two hundred of each; two hundred dried chickens, ducks and geese; two hundred pair of pheasants and hares; two hundred pair of bears’ paws; twenty catties of deer tendons; fifty catties of bêche-de-mer; fifty deer tongues; fifty ox tongues; twenty catties of dried clams; filberts, fir-cones, peaches, apricots and squash, two hundred bags of each; fifty pair of salt prawns; two hundred catties of dried shrimps; a thousand catties of superfine, picked charcoal; two thousand catties of medium charcoal; twenty thousand catties of common charcoal; two piculs of red rice, grown in the imperial grounds; fifty bushels of greenish, glutinous rice; fifty bushels of white glutinous rice; fifty bushels of pounded non-glutinous rice; fifty bushels of various kinds of corn and millet; a thousand piculs of ordinary common rice. Exclusive of a cartload of every sort of vegetables, and irrespective of two thousand five hundred taels, derived from the sale of corn and millet and every kind of domestic animals, your servant respectfully presents, for your honour’s delectation, two pair of live deer, four pair of white rabbits, four pair of black rabbits, two pair of live variegated fowls, and two pair of duck, from western countries.”

When Chia Chen had exhausted the list, “Bring him in!” he cried. In a little time, he perceived Wu Chin-hsiao make his appearance inside. But simply halting in the court, he bumped his head on the ground and paid his respects.

Chia Chen desired a servant to raise him up. “You’re still so hale!” he smiled.

“I don’t deceive you, Sir,” Wu Chin-hsiao observed, “when I say that yours servants are so accustomed to walking, that had we not come, we wouldn’t have felt exceedingly dull. Isn’t the whole crowd of them keen upon coming to see what the world is like at the feet of the son of heaven? Yet they’re, after all, so young in years, that there’s the fear of their going astray on the way. But, in a few more years, I shall be able to appease my solicitude on their account.”

“How many days have you been on the way?” Chia Chen inquired.

“To reply to your question, Sir,” Wu Chin-hsiao ventured, “so much snow has fallen this year that it’s everywhere out of town four and five feet in depth. The other day, the weather suddenly turned mild, and with the thaw that set in, it became so very hard to make any progress that we wasted several days. Yet albeit we’ve been a month and two days in accomplishing the journey; it isn’t anything excessive. But as I feared lest you, Sir, would be giving way to anxiety, didn’t I hurry along to arrive in good time?”

“How is it, I said, that he’s come only to-day!” Chia Chen observed.

“But upon looking over the list just now it seemed to me that you, old fossil, had come again to make as much as fun of me, as if you were putting up a stage for a boxing-match.”

Wu Chin-hsiao hastily drew near a couple of steps. “I must tell you, Sir,” he remarked, “that the harvest this year hasn’t really been good. Rain set in ever since the third moon, and there it went on incessantly straight up to the eighth moon. Indeed, the weather hasn’t kept fine for five or six consecutive days. In the ninth moon, there came a storm of hail, each stone of which was about the size of a saucer. And over an area of the neighbouring two or three hundred li, the men and houses, animals and crops, which sustained injury, numbered over thousands and ten thousands. Hence it is that the things we’ve brought now are what they are. Your servant would not have the audacity to tell a lie.”

Chia Chen knitted his eyebrows. “I had computed,” he said, “that the very least

you would have brought would have been five thousand taels. What's this enough for? There are only now eight or nine of you farmers, and from two localities reports have contrariwise reached us during the course of this very year of the occurrence of droughts; and do you people come again to try your larks with us? Why, verily these aren't sufficient to see the new year in with."

"And yet," Wu Chin-hsiao argued, "your place can be looked upon as having fared well; for my brother, who's only over a hundred li away from where I am, has actually fallen in with a vastly different lot! He has at present eight farms of that mansion under his control, and these considerably larger than those of yours, Sir; and yet this year they too have only produced but a few things. So nothing beyond two or three thousand taels has been realised. What's more, they've had to borrow money."

"Quite so!" Chia Chen exclaimed. "The state of things in my place here is passable. I've got no outside outlay. The main thing I have to mind is to make provision for a year's necessary expenses. If I launch out into luxuries, I have to suffer hardships, so I must try a little self-denial and manage to save something. It's the custom, besides, at the end of the year to send presents to people and invite others; but I'll thicken the skin of my face a bit, (and dispense with both), and have done. I'm not like the inmates in that mansion, who have, during the last few years, added so many items of expenditure, that it's, of course, a matter of impossibility for them to avoid loosening their purse strings. But they haven't, on the other hand, made any addition to their funds and landed property. During the course of the past year or two, they've had to make up many deficits. And if they don't appeal to you, to whom can they go?"

Wu Chin-hsiao laughed. "It's true," he said, "that in that mansion many items have been added, but money goes out and money comes in. And won't the Empress and His Majesty the Emperor bestow their favour?"

At these words, Chia Chen smilingly faced Chia Jung and the other inmates. "Just you listen to his arguments!" he exclaimed. "Aren't they ridiculous, eh?"

Chia Jung and the rest promptly smiled. "Among your hills and seaboard can anything," they observed, "be known with regard to this principle? Is it likely, pray, that the Empress will ever make over to us the Emperor's treasury? Why, even supposing she may at heart entertain any such wish, she herself cannot possibly adopt independent action. Of course, she does confer her benefits on

them, but this is at stated times and fixed periods, and they merely consist of a few coloured satins, antiquities, and bric-a-brac. In fact, when she does bestow hard cash on them, it doesn't exceed a hundred ounces of silver. But did she even give them so much as a thousand and more taels, what would these suffice for? During which of the two last years have they not had to fork out several thousands of taels? In the first year, the imperial consort paid a visit to her parents; and just calculate how much they must have run through in laying out that park, and you'll then know how they stand! Why, if in another couple of years, the Empress comes and pays them a second visit, they'll be, I'm inclined to fancy, regular paupers."

"That's why," urged Chia Chen smiling, "country people are such unsophisticated creatures, that though they behold what lies on the surface, they have no idea of what is inside hidden from view. They're just like a piece of yellow cedar made into a mallet for beating the sonorous stones with. The exterior looks well enough; but it's all bitter inside."

"In very truth," Chia Jung added, laughing also the while, as he addressed himself to Chia Chen, "that mansion is impoverished. The other day, I heard a consultation held on the sly between aunt Secunda and Yüan Yang. What they wanted was to filch our worthy senior's things and go and pawn them in order to raise money."

"This is just another devilish trick of that minx Feng!" Chia Chen smiled. "How ever could they have reached such straits? She's certain to have seen that expenses were great, and that heavy deficits had to be squared, so wishing again to curtail some item or other, who knows which, she devised this plan as a preparatory step, in order that when it came to be generally known, people should say that they had been reduced to such poverty. But from the result of the calculations I have arrived at in my mind, things haven't as yet attained this climax:"

Continuing, he issued orders to a servant to take Wu Chin-hsiao outside, and to treat him with every consideration. But no further mention need be made of him.

During this while, Chia Chen gave directions to keep from the various perquisites just received such as would prove serviceable for the sacrifices to their ancestors, and, selecting a few things of each kind, he told Chia Jung to have them taken to the Jung mansion. After this, he himself kept what was

required for his own use at home; and then allotting the rest, with due compliance to gradation, he had share after share piled up at the foot of the moon-shaped platform, and sending servants to summon the young men of the clan, he distributed them among them.

In quick succession, numerous contributions for the ancestral sacrifices were likewise sent from the Jung mansion; also presents for Chia Chen. Chia Chen inspected the things, and having them removed, he completed preparing the sacrificial utensils. Then putting on a pair of slipshod shoes and throwing over his shoulders a long pelisse with ‘She-li-sun’ fur, he bade the servants spread a large wolf-skin rug in a sunny place on the stone steps below the pillars of the pavilion, and with his back to the warm sun, he leisurely watched the young people come and receive the new year gifts. Perceiving that Chia Ch’in had also come to fetch his share, Chia Chen called him over. “How is it that you’ve come too?” he asked. “Who told you to come?”

Chia Ch’in respectfully dropped his arms against his sides. “I heard,” he replied, “that you, senior Sir, had sent for us to appear before you here and receive our presents; so I didn’t wait for the servants to go and tell me, but came straightway.”

“These things,” Chia Chen added, “are intended for distribution among all those uncles and cousins who have nothing to do and who enjoy no source of income. Those two years you had no work, I gave you plenty of things too. But you’re entrusted at present with some charge in the other mansion, and you exercise in the family temples control over the bonzes and taoist priests, so that you as well derive every month your share of an allowance. Irrespective of that, the allowances and money of the Buddhist priests pass through your hands. And do you still come to fetch things of this kind? You’re far too greedy. Just you look at the fineries you wear. Why, they look like the habiliments of one who has money to spend, of a regular man of business. You said some time back that you had nothing which could bring you in any money, but how is it that you’ve got none again now? You really don’t look as if you were in the same plight that you were in once upon a time.”

“I have in my home a goodly number of inmates,” Chia Ch’in explained, “so my expenses are great.”

Chia Chen gave a saturnine laugh. “Are you trying again to excuse yourself with

me?” he cried. “Do you flatter yourself that I have no idea of your doings in the family temples? When you get there, you, of course, play the grand personnage and no one has the courage to run counter to your wishes. Then you’ve also got the handling of money. Besides you’re far away from us, so you’re arrogant and audacious. Night after night, you get bad characters together; you gamble for money; and you keep women and young boys. And though you now fling away money with such a high hand, do you still presume to come and receive gifts? But as you can’t manage to filch anything to take along with you, it will do you good to get beans, with the pole used for carrying water. Wait until the new year is over, and then I’ll certainly report you to your uncle Secundus.”

Chia Ch’in got crimson in the face, and did not venture to utter a single word by way of extenuation. A servant, however, then announced that the Prince from the Pei mansion had sent a pair of scrolls and a purse.

At this announcement, Chia Chen immediately told Chia Jung to go out and entertain the messengers. “And just say,” he added, “that I’m not at home.”

Chia Jung went on his way. Chia Chen, meanwhile, dismissed Chia Ch’in; and, seeing the things taken away, he returned to his quarters and finished his evening meal with Mrs. Yu. But nothing of any note occurred during that night.

The next day, he had, needless to say, still more things to give his mind to. Soon arrived the twenty ninth day of the twelfth moon, and everything was in perfect readiness. In the two mansions alike, the gate guardian gods and scrolls were renovated. The hanging tablets were newly varnished. The peach charms glistened like new. In the Ning Kuo mansion, every principal door, starting from the main entrance, the ceremonial gates, the doors of the large pavilions, of the winter apartments, and inner pavilions, the inner three gates, the inner ceremonial gates and the inner boundary gates, straight up to the doors of the main halls, was flung wide open. At the bottom of the steps, were placed on either side large and lofty vermilion candles, of uniform colour; which when lit presented the appearance of a pair of golden dragons.

On the morrow, dowager lady Chia and those with any official status, donned the court dress consistent with their grade, and taking first and foremost a retinue of inmates with them, they entered the palace in eight bearer state chairs, and presented their congratulations. After acquitting themselves of the ceremonial rites, and partaking of a banquet, they betook themselves back, and alighted

from their chairs on their arrival at the winter hall of the Ning mansion. The young men, who had not followed the party to court, waited, arranged in their proper order, in front of the entrance the King mansion, and subsequently led the way into the ancestral temple.

But to return to Pao-ch'in. This was the first occasion, on which she put her foot inside to look at the inner precincts of the Chia ancestral temple, and as she did so, she scrutinized with minute attention all the details that met her gaze in the halls dedicated to their forefathers. These consisted, in fact, of a distinct courtyard on the west side of the Ning mansion. Within the balustrade, painted black, stood five apartments. Over the main entrance to these was suspended a flat tablet with the inscription in four characters: 'Ancestral hall of the Chia family.' On the side of these was recorded the fact that it had been the handiwork of Wang Hsi-feng, specially promoted to the rank of Grand Tutor of the Heir Apparent, and formerly Chancellor of the Imperial Academy. On either side, was one of a pair of scrolls, bearing the motto:

Besmear the earth with your liver and brains, all ye people, out of gratitude for the bounty of (the Emperor's) protection! The reputation (of the Chia family) reaches the very skies. Hundred generations rejoice in the splendour of the sacrifices accorded them.

This too had been executed by Wang, the Grand Tutor.

As soon as the court was entered, a raised road was reached, paved with white marble, on both sides of which were planted deep green fir trees, and kingfisher-green cypress trees. On the moon-shaped platform were laid out antiquities, tripods, libation-vases, and other similar articles. In front of the antechamber was hung a gold-coloured flat tablet, with nine dragons, and the device:

Like a dazzling star is the statesman, who assists the Emperor.

This was the autograph of a former Emperor.

On both sides figured a pair of antithetical scrolls, with the motto:

Their honours equal the sun and moon in lustre. Their fame is without bounds. It descends to their sons and grandsons.

These lines were likewise from the imperial pencil. Over the five-roomed main

hall was suspended a tablet, inlaid with green, representing wriggling dragons. The sentiments consisted of:

Mindful of the remotest and heedful of the most distant ancestors.

A pair of antithetical scrolls was hung on the sides; on which was written:

After their death, their sons and grandsons enjoy their beneficent virtues. Up to the very present the masses think of the Jung and Ning families.

Both these mottoes owed their origin to the imperial pencil.

Inside, lanterns and candles burnt with resplendent brightness. Embroidered curtains and decorated screens were hung in such profusion that though a large number of ancestral tablets were placed about they could not be clearly discerned. The main thing that struck the eye was the inmates of the Chia mansion standing about, on the left and right, disposed in their proper order. Chia Ching was overseer of the sacrifices. Chia She played the part of assistant. Chia Chen presented the cups for libations. Chia Lien and Chia Tsung offered up the strips of paper. Pao-yü held the incense. Chia Ch'ang and Chia Ling distributed the hassocks and looked after the receptacles for the ashes of joss-sticks. The black clad musicians discoursed music. The libation-cups were offered thrice in sacrifice. These devotions over, paper money was burnt; and libations of wine were poured. After the observance of the prescribed rites, the band stopped, and withdrew. The whole company then pressed round dowager lady Chia, and repaired to the main hall, where the images were placed. The embroidered curtains were hung high up. The variegated screens shut in the place from view. The fragrant candles burnt with splendour. In the place of honour, of the main apartment, were suspended the portraits of two progenitors of the Ning and Jung, both of whom were attired in costumes, ornamented with dragons, and clasped with belts of jade. On the right and left of them, were also arrayed the likenesses of a number of eminent ancestors.

Chia Heng, Chia Chih and the others of the same status stood according to their proper grades in a row extending from the inner ceremonial gate straight up to the verandah of the main hall. Outside the balustrade came at last Chia Ching and Chia She. Inside the balustrade figured the various female members of the family. The domestics and pages were arrayed beyond the ceremonial gate. As each set of eatables arrived, they transmitted them as far as the ceremonial gate,

where Chia Heng, Chia Chih and his companions were ready to receive them. From one to another, they afterwards reached the bottom of the steps and found their way into Chia Ching's hands.

Chia Jung, being the eldest grandson of the senior branch, was the only person, who penetrated within the precincts of the balustrade reserved for the female inmates. So whenever Chia Ching had any offerings to pass on, he delivered them to Chia Jung, and Chia Jung gave them to his wife; who again handed them to lady Feng, Mrs. Yu, and the several ladies. And when these offerings reached the sacrificial altar, they were at length surrendered to Madame Wang. Madame Wang thereupon placed them in dowager lady Chia's hands, and old lady Chia deposited them on the altar.

Madame Hsing stood on the west-east side of the sacrificial altar, and along with old lady Chia, she offered the oblations and laid them in their proper places. After the vegetables, rice, soup, sweets, wine and tea had been handed up, Chia Jung eventually retired outside and resumed his position above Chia Ch'in.

Of the male inmates, whose names were composed with the radical 'wen,' 'literature,' Chia Ching was at the time the head. Below followed those with the radical 'Yü,' 'gem,' led by Chia Chen. Next to these, came the inmates with the radical 'ts'ao,' 'grass,' headed by Chia Jung. These were arranged in proper order, with due regard to left and right. The men figured on the east; the women on the west.

When dowager lady Chia picked up a joss-stick and prostrated herself to perform her devotions, one and all fell simultaneously on their knees, packing up the five-roomed principal pavilion, the inside as well as outside of the three antechambers, the verandahs, the top and bottom of the stairs, the interior of the two vermilion avenues so closely with all their fineries and embroideries that not the slightest space remained vacant among them. Not so much as the caw of a crow struck the ear. All that was audible was the report of jingling and tinkling, and the sound of the gold bells and jade ornaments slightly rocked to and fro. Besides these, the creaking noise made by the shoes of the inmates, while getting up and kneeling down.

In a little time, the ceremonies were brought to a close. Chia Ching, Chia She and the rest hastily retired and adjourned to the Jung mansion, where they waited with the special purpose of paying their obeisance to dowager lady Chia.

Mrs. Yu's drawing rooms were entirely covered with red carpets. In the centre stood a large gold cloisonné brasier, with three legs, in imitation of rhinoceros tusks, washed with gold. On the stovecouch in the upper part was laid a new small red hair rug. On it were placed deep red back-cushions with embroidered representations of dragons, which were embedded among clouds and clasped the character longevity, as well as reclining-pillows and sitting-rugs. Covers made of black fox skin were moreover thrown over the couch, along with skins of pure white fox for sitting-cushions.

Dowager lady Chia was invited to place herself on the couch; and on the skin-rugs spread, on either side, two or three of the sisters-in-law, of the same standing as old lady Chia, were urged to sit down.

After the necessary arrangements had been concluded, skin rugs were also put on the small couch, erected in a horizontal position on the near portion of the apartments, and Madame Hsing and the other ladies of her age were motioned to seat themselves. On the two sides stood, face to face on the floor, twelve chairs carved and lacquered, over which were thrown antimacassars and small grey-squirrel rugs, of uniform colour. At the foot of each chair was a large copper foot-stove. On these chairs, Pao-ch'in and the other young ladies were asked to sit down.

Mrs. Yu took a tray and with her own hands she presented tea to old lady Chia. Chia Jung's wife served the rest of their seniors. Subsequently, Mrs. Yu helped Madame Hsing too and her contemporaries; and Chia Jung's wife then gave tea to the various young ladies; while lady Feng, Li Wan and a few others simply remained below, ready to minister to their wants. After their tea, Madame Hsing and her compeers were the first to rise and come and wait on dowager lady Chia, while she had hers. Dowager lady Chia chatted for a time with her old sisters-in-law and then desired the servants to look to her chair.

Lady Feng thereupon speedily walked up and supported her to rise to her feet.

"The evening meal has long ago been got ready for you, venerable ancestor," Mrs. Yu smiled. "You've year by year shown no desire to honour us with your presence, but tarry a bit on this occasion and partake of some refreshment before you cross over. Is it likely, in fact, that we can't come up to that girl Feng?"

"Go on, worthy senior!" laughed lady Feng, as she propped old lady Chia. "Let's

go home and eat our own. Don’t heed what she says!”

“In what bustle and confusion aren’t you in over here,” smiled dowager lady Chia, “with all the sacrifices to our ancestors, and how could you stand all the trouble I’m putting you to? I’ve never, furthermore, had every year anything to eat with you; but you’ve always been in the way of sending me things. So isn’t it as well that you should again let me have a few? And as I’ll keep for the next day what I shan’t be able to get through, won’t I thus have a good deal more?”

This remark evoked general laughter.

“Whatever you do,” she went on to enjoin her, “mind you depute some reliable persons to sit up at night and look after the incense fires; but they mustn’t let their wits go wool-gathering.”

Mrs. Yu gave her to understand that she would see to it, and they sallied out, at the same time, into the fore part of the winter-apartments. And when Mrs. Yu and her friends went past the screen, the pages introduced the bearers, who shouldered the sedan and walked out by the main entrance. Then following too in the track of Madame Hsing and the other ladies, Mrs. Yu repaired in their company into the Jung mansion.

(Dowager lady Chia’s) chair had, meanwhile, got beyond the principal gateway. Here again were deployed, on the east side of the street, the bearers of insignia, the retinue and musicians of the duke of Ning Kuo. They crammed the whole extent of the street. Comers and goers were alike kept back. No thoroughfare was allowed. Shortly, the Jung mansion was reached. The large gates and main entrances were also thrown open straight up to the very interior of the compound. On the present occasion, however, the bearers did not put the chair down by the winter quarters, but passing the main hall, and turning to the west, they rested it on their arrival at the near side of dowager lady Chia’s principal pavilion. The various attendants pressed round old lady Chia and followed her into her main apartment, where decorated mats and embroidered screens had also been placed about, and everything looked as if brand-new.

In the brasier, deposited in the centre of the room, burnt fir and cedar incense, and a hundred mixed herbs. The moment dowager lady Chia ensconced herself into a seat, an old nurse entered and announced that: “the senior ladies had come to pay their respects.”

Old lady Chia rose with alacrity to her feet to go and greet them, when she perceived that two or three of her old sisters-in-law had already stepped inside, so clasping each other's hands, they now laughed, and now they pressed each other to sit down. After tea, they took their departure; but dowager lady Chia only escorted them as far as the inner ceremonial gate, and retracing her footsteps, she came and resumed the place of honour. Chia Ching, Chia She and the other seniors then ushered the various junior male members of the household into her apartments.

"I put you," smiled old lady Chia, "to ever so much trouble and inconvenience from one year's end to another; so don't pay any obeisance."

But while she spoke, the men formed themselves into one company, and the women into another, and performed their homage, group by group. This over, arm-chairs were arranged on the left and on the right; and on these chairs they too subsequently seated themselves, according to their seniority and gradation, to receive salutations. The men and women servants, and the pages and maids employed in the two mansions then paid, in like manner, the obeisance consonant with their positions, whether high, middle or low; and this ceremony observed, the new year money was distributed, together with purses, gold and silver ingots, and other presents of the same description. A 'rejoicing together' banquet was spread. The men sat on the east; the women on the west. 'T'u Su,' new year's day, wine was served; also 'rejoicing together' soup, 'propitious' fruits, and 'as you like' cakes. At the close of the banquet, dowager lady Chia rose and penetrated into the inner chamber with the purpose of effecting a change in her costume, so the several inmates present could at last disperse and go their own way.

That night, incense was burnt and offerings presented at the various altars to Buddha and the kitchen god. In the courtyard of Madame Wang's main quarters paper horses and incense for sacrifices to heaven and earth were all ready. At the principal entrance of the garden of Broad Vista were suspended horn lanterns, which from their lofty places cast their bright rays on either side. Every place was hung with street lanterns. Every inmate, whether high or low, was got up in gala dress. Throughout the whole night, human voices resounded confusedly. The din of talking and laughing filled the air. Strings of crackers and rockets were let off incessantly.

The morrow came. At the fifth watch, dowager lady Chia and the other senior

members of the family donned the grand costumes, which accorded with their status, and with a complete retinue they entered the palace to present their court congratulations; for that day was, in addition, the anniversary of Yüan Ch'un's birth. After they had regaled themselves at a collation, they wended their way back, and betaking themselves also into the Ning mansion, they offered their oblations to their ancestors, and then returned home and received the conventional salutations, after which they put off their fineries and retired to rest.

None of the relatives and friends, who came to wish their compliments of the season, were admitted into (old lady Chia's) presence, but simply had a friendly chat with Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li, and studied their own convenience. Or along with Pao-yü, Pao-ch'ai and the other young ladies, they amused themselves by playing the game of war or dominoes.

Madame Wang and lady Feng had one day after another their hands full with the invitations they had to issue for the new year wine. In the halls and courts of the other side theatricals and banquets succeeded each other and relations and friends dropped in in an incessant string. Bustle reigned for seven or eight consecutive days, before things settled down again.

But presently the festival of the full moon of the first month drew near, and both mansions, the Ning as well as the Jung, were everywhere ornamented with lanterns and decorations. On the eleventh, Chia She invited dowager lady Chia and the other inmates. On the next day, Chia Chen also entertained his old senior and Madame Wang and lady Feng. But for us to record on how many consecutive days invitations were extended to them to go and, drink the new year wine, would be an impossible task.

The fifteenth came. On this evening dowager lady Chia gave orders to have several banqueting tables laid in the main reception hall, to engage a company of young actors, to have every place illuminated with flowered lanterns of various colours, and to assemble at a family entertainment all the sons, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and grandchildren's wives and other members of the two mansions of Ning and Jung. As however Chia Ching did not habitually have any wine or take any ordinary food, no one went to press him to come.

On the seventeenth, he hastened, at the close of the ancestral sacrifices, out of town to chasten himself. In fact, even during the few days he spent at home, he merely frequented retired rooms and lonely places, and did not take the least

interest in any single concern. But he need not detain us any further.

As for Chia She, after he had received dowager lady Chia's presents, he said goodbye and went away. But old lady Chia herself was perfectly aware that she could not conveniently tarry any longer on this side so she too followed his example and took her departure.

When Chia She got home, he along with all the guests feasted his eyes on the illuminations and drank wine with them, Music and singing deafened the ear. Embroidered fineries were everywhere visible. For his way of seeking amusement was unlike that customary in this portion of the establishment.

In dowager lady Chia's reception hall, ten tables were meanwhile arranged. By each table was placed a teapoy. On these teapoys stood censers and bottles; three things in all. (In the censers) was burnt 'Pai ho' palace incense, a gift from his Majesty the Emperor. But small pots, about eight inches long, four to five inches broad and two or three inches high, adorned with scenery in the shape of rockeries, were also placed about. All of which contained fresh flowers. Small foreign lacquer trays were likewise to be seen, laden with diminutive painted teacups of antique ware. Transparent gauze screens with frames of carved blackwood, ornamented with a fringe representing flowers and giving the text of verses, figured too here and there. In different kinds of small old vases were combined together the three friends of winter (pine, bamboo and plum,) as well as 'jade-hall,' 'happiness and honour,' and other fresh flowers.

At the upper two tables sat 'sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Hsüeh. On the east was only laid a single table. But there as well were placed carved screens, covered with dragons, and a short low-footed couch, with a full assortment of back-cushions, reclining-cushions and skin-rugs. On the couch stood a small teapoy, light and handy, of foreign lacquer, inlaid with gold. On the teapoy were arrayed cups, bowls, foreign cloth napkins and such things. But on it spectacle case was also conspicuous.

Dowager lady Chia was reposing on the couch. At one time, she chatted and laughed with the whole company; at another, she took up her spectacles and looked at what was going on on the stage.

"Make allowances," she said, "for my old age. My bones are quite sore; so if I be a little out of order in my conduct bear with me, and let us entertain each

other while I remain in a recumbent position." Continuing, she desired Hu Po to make herself comfortable on the couch, and take a small club and tap her legs. No table stood below the couch, but only a high teapoy. On it were a high stand with tassels, flower-vases, incense-burners and other similar articles. But, a small, high table, laden with cups and chopsticks, had besides been got ready. At the table next to this, the four cousins, Pao-ch'in, Hsiang-yün, Tai-yü and Pao-yü were told to seat themselves. The various viands and fruits that were brought in were first presented to dowager lady Chia for inspection. If they took her fancy, she kept them at the small table. But once tasted by her, they were again removed and placed on their table. We could therefore safely say that none but the four cousins sat along with their old grandmother.

The seats occupied by Madame Hsing and Madame Wang were below. Lower down came Mrs. Yu, Li Wan, lady Feng and Chia Jung's wife. On the west sat Pao-ch'ai, Li Wen, Li Ch'i, Chou Yen, Ying Ch'un, and the other cousins. On the large pillars, on either side, were suspended, in groups of three and five, glass lanterns ornamented with fringes. In front of each table stood a candlestick in the shape of drooping lotus leaves. The candlesticks contained coloured candles. These lotus leaves were provided with enamelled springs, of foreign make, so they could be twisted outward, thus screening the rays of the lights and throwing them (on the stage), enabling one to watch the plays with exceptional distinctness. The window-frames and doors had all been removed. In every place figured coloured fringes, and various kinds of court lanterns. Inside and outside the verandahs, and under the roofs of the covered passages, which stretched on either side, were hung lanterns of sheep-horn, glass, embroidered gauze or silk, decorated or painted, of satin or of paper.

Round different tables sat Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Huan, Chia Tsung, Chia Jung, Chia Yün, Chia Ch'in, Chia Ch'ang, Chia Ling and other male inmates of the family.

Dowager lady Chia had at an early hour likewise sent servants to invite the male and female members of the whole clan. But those advanced in years were not disposed to take part in any excitement. Some had no one at the time to look after things; others too were detained by ill-health; and much though these had every wish to be present, they were not, after all, in a fit state to come. Some were so envious of riches, and so ashamed of their poverty, that they entertained no desire to avail themselves of the invitation. Others, what is more, fostered such a dislike for, and stood in such awe of, lady Feng that they felt bitter

towards her and would not accept. Others again were timid and shy, and so little accustomed to seeing people, that they could not muster sufficient courage to come. Hence it was that despite the large number of female relatives in the clan, none came but Chia Lan's mother, née Lou, who brought Chia Lan with her. In the way of men, there were only Chia Ch'in, Chia Yün, Chia Ch'ang and Chia Ling; the four of them and no others. The managers, at present under lady Feng's control, were however among those who accepted. But albeit there was not a complete gathering of the inmates on this occasion, yet, for a small family entertainment, sufficient animation characterised the proceedings.

About this time, Lin Chih-hsiao's wife also made her appearance, with half a dozen married women who carried three divan tables between them. Each table was covered with a red woollen cloth, on which lay a lot of cash, picked out clean and of equal size, and recently issued from the mint. These were strung together with a deep-red cord. Each couple carried a table, so there were in all three tables.

Lin Chih-hsiao's wife directed that two tables should be placed below the festive board, round which were seated Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li, and that one should be put at the foot of dowager lady Chia's couch.

"Place it in the middle!" old lady Chia exclaimed. "These women have never known what good manners mean. Put the table down." Saying this, she picked up the cash, and loosening the knots, she unstrung them and piled them on the table.

'The reunion in the western chamber' was just being sung. The play was drawing to a close. They had reached a part where Yü Shu runs off at night in high dudgeon, and Wen Pao jokingly cried out: "You go off with your monkey up; but, as luck would have it, this is the very day of the fifteenth of the first moon, and a family banquet is being given by the old lady in the Jung Kuo mansion, so wait and I'll jump on this horse and hurry in and ask for something to eat. I must look sharp!" The joke made old lady Chia, and the rest of the company laugh.

"What a dreadful, impish child!" Mrs. Hsüeh and the others exclaimed. "Yet poor thing!"

"This child is only just nine years of age," lady Feng interposed.

"He has really made a clever hit!" dowager lady Chia laughed. "Tip him!" she

shouted.

This shout over, three married women, who has previously got ready several small wicker baskets, came up, as soon as they heard the word ‘tip’, and, taking the heaps of loose cash piled on the table, they each filled a basket full, and, issuing outside, they approached the stage. “Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh, and the family relative, Mrs. Li, present Wen Pao this money to purchase something to eat with,” they said.

At the end of these words, they flung the contents of the baskets upon the stage. So all then that fell on the ear was the rattle of the cash flying in every direction over the boards.

Chia Chen and Chia Lien had, by this time, enjoined the pages to fetch big baskets full of cash and have them in readiness. But as, reader, you do not know as yet in what way these presents were given, listen to the circumstances detailed in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER LIV.

Dowager lady Chia, née Shih, does away with rotten old customs. Wang Hsi-feng imitates in jest (the dutiful son), by getting herself up in gaudy theatrical clothes.

Chia Chen and Chia Lien had, we will now explain, secretly got ready large baskets of cash, so the moment they heard old lady Chia utter the word ‘tip,’ they promptly bade the pages be quick and fling the money. The noise of the cash, running on every side of the stage, was all that fell on the ear. Dowager lady Chia thoroughly enjoyed it.

The two men then rose to their feet. The pages hastened to lay hold of a silver kettle, newly brought in with fresh wine, and to deposit it in Chia Lien’s hands, who followed Chia Chen with quick step into the inner rooms. Chia Chen advanced first up to ‘sister-in-law’ Li’s table, and curtseying, he raised her cup, and turned round, whereupon Chia Lien quickly filled it to the brim. Next they approached Mrs. Hsüeh’s table, and they also replenished her cup.

These two ladies lost no time in standing up, and smilingly expostulating. “Gentlemen,” they said, “please take your seats. What’s the use of standing on such ceremonies?”

But presently every one, with the exception of the two ladies Mesdames Hsing and Wang, quitted the banquet and dropping their arms against their bodies they stood on one side. Chia Chen and his companion then drew near dowager lady Chia’s couch. But the couch was so low that they had to stoop on their knees. Chia Chen was in front, and presented the cup. Chia Lien was behind, and held the kettle up to her. But notwithstanding that only these two offered her wine, Chia Tsung and the other young men followed them closely in the order of their age and grade; so the moment they saw them kneel, they immediately threw themselves on their knees. Pao-yü too prostrated himself at once.

Hsiang-yün stealthily gave him a push. “What’s the use of your now following their lead again and falling on your knees?” she said. “But since you behave like this, wouldn’t it be well if you also went and poured wine all round?”

Pao-yü laughed. “Hold on a bit,” he rejoined in a low tone, “and I’ll go and do so.”

So speaking, he waited until his two relatives had finished pouring the wine and risen to their feet, when he also went and replenished the cups of Mesdames Wang and Hsing.

“What about the young ladies?” Chia Chen smilingly asked.

“You people had better be going,” old lady Chia and the other ladies unanimously observed. “They’ll, then, be more at their ease.”

At this hint Chia Chen and his companions eventually withdrew. The second watch had not, at the time, yet gone. The play that was being sung was: ‘The eight worthies look at the lanterns,’ consisting of eight acts; and had now reached a sensational part.

Pao-yü at this stage left the feast and was going out. “Where are you off to?” inquired his grandmother Chia. “The crackers outside are dreadful. Mind, the lighted pieces of paper falling from above might burn you.”

Pao-yü smiled. “I’m not going far,” he answered. “I’m merely going out of the

room, and will be back at once."

Dowager lady Chia directed the matrons to "be careful and escort him."

Pao-yü forthwith sallied out; with no other attendants however than She Yüeh, Ch'iu Wen and several youthful maids.

"How is it," his grandmother Chia felt obliged so ask, "that I don't see anything of Hsi Jen? Is she too now putting on high and mighty airs that she only sends these juvenile girls here?"

Madame Wang rose to her feet with all haste. "Her mother," she explained, "died the other day; so being in deep mourning, she couldn't very well present herself."

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head assentingly. "When one is in service," she smilingly remarked, "there should be no question of mourning or no mourning. Is it likely that, if she were still in my pay, she wouldn't at present be here? All these practices have quite become precedents!"

Lady Feng crossed over to her. "Had she even not been in mourning to-night," she chimed in with a laugh, "she would have had to be in the garden and keep an eye over that pile of lanterns, candles, and fireworks, as they're most dangerous things. For as soon as any theatricals are set on foot in here, who doesn't surreptitiously sneak out from the garden to have a look? But as far as she goes, she's diligent, and careful of every place. Moreover, when the company disperses and brother Pao-yü retires to sleep, everything will be in perfect readiness. But, had she also come, that bevy of servants wouldn't again have cared a straw for anything; and on his return, after the party, the bedding would have been cold, the tea-water wouldn't have been ready, and he would have had to put up with every sort of discomfort. That's why I told her that there was no need for her to come. But should you, dear senior, wish her here, I'll send for her straightway and have done."

Old lady Chia lent an ear to her arguments. "What you say," she promptly put in, "is perfectly right. You've made better arrangements than I could. Quick, don't send for her! But when did her mother die? How is it I know nothing about it?"

"Some time ago," lady Feng laughed, "Hsi Jen came in person and told you, worthy ancestor, and how is it you've forgotten it?"

“Yes,” resumed dowager lady Chia smiling, after some reflection, “I remember now. My memory is really not of the best.”

At this, everybody gave way to laughter. “How could your venerable ladyship,” they said, “recollect so many matters?”

Dowager lady Chia thereupon heaved a sigh. “How I remember,” she added, “the way she served me ever since her youth up; and how she waited upon Yün Erh also; how at last she was given to that prince of devils, and how she has slaved away with that imp for the last few years. She is, besides, not a slave-girl, born or bred in the place. Nor has she ever received any great benefits from our hands. When her mother died, I meant to have given her several taels for her burial; but it quite slipped from my mind.”

“The other day,” lady Feng remarked, “Madame Wang presented her with forty taels; so that was all right.”

At these words, old lady Chia nodded assent. “Yes, never mind about that,” she observed. “Yuan Yang’s mother also died, as it happens, the other day; but taking into consideration that both her parents lived in the south, I didn’t let her return home to observe a period of mourning. But as both these girls are now in mourning, why not allow them to live together? They’ll thus be able to keep each other company. Take a few fruits, eatables, and other such things,” continuing she bade a matron, “and give them to those two girls to eat.”

“Would she likely wait until now?” Hu Po laughingly interposed. “Why, she joined (Hsi Jen) long ago.”

In the course of this conversation, the various inmates partook of some more wine, and watched the theatricals.

But we will now turn our attention to Pao-yü. He made his way straight into the garden. The matrons saw well enough that he was returning to his rooms, but instead of following him in, they ensconced themselves near the fire in the tea-room situated by the garden-gate, and made the best of the time by drinking and playing cards with the girls in charge of the tea. Pao-yü entered the court. The lanterns burnt brightly, yet not a human voice was audible. “Have they all, forsooth, gone to sleep?” She Yüeh ventured. “Let’s walk in gently, and give them a fright!”

Presently, they stepped, on tiptoe, past the mirrored partition-wall. At a glance, they discerned Hsi Jen lying on the stovecouch, face to face with some other girl. On the opposite side sat two or three old nurses nodding, half asleep. Pao-yü conjectured that both the girls were plunged in sleep, and was just about to enter, when of a sudden some one was heard to heave a sigh and to say: “How evident it is that worldly matters are very uncertain! Here you lived all alone in here, while your father and mother tarried abroad, and roamed year after year from east to west, without any fixed place of abode. I ever thought that you wouldn’t have been able to be with them at their last moments; but, as it happened, (your mother) died in this place this year, and you could, after all, stand by her to the end.”

“Quite so!” rejoined Hsi Jen. “Even I little expected to be able to see any of my parents’ funeral. When I broke the news to our Madame Wang, she also gave me forty taels. This was really a kind attention on her part. I hadn’t nevertheless presumed to indulge in any vain hopes.”

Pao-yü overheard what was said. Hastily twisting himself round, he remarked in a low voice, addressing himself to She Yüeh and her companions: “Who would have fancied her also in here? But were I to enter, she’ll bolt away in another tantrum! Better then that we should retrace our steps, and let them quietly have a chat together, eh? Hsi Jen was alone, and down in the mouth, so it’s a fortunate thing that she joined her in such good time.”

As he spoke, they once more walked out of the court with gentle tread. Pao-yü went to the back of the rockery, and stopping short, he raised his clothes. She Yüeh and Ch’iu Wen stood still, and turned their faces away. “Stoop,” they smiled, “and then loosen your clothes! Be careful that the wind doesn’t blow on your stomach!”

The two young maids, who followed behind, surmised that he was bent upon satisfying a natural want, and they hurried ahead to the tea-room to prepare the water.

Just, however, as Pao-yü was crossing over, two married women came in sight, advancing from the opposite direction. “Who’s there?” they inquired.

“Pao-yü is here,” Ch’ing Wen answered. “But mind, if you bawl and shout like that, you’ll give him a start.”

The women promptly laughed. “We had no idea,” they said, “that we were coming, at a great festive time like this, to bring trouble upon ourselves! What a lot of hard work must day after day fall to your share, young ladies.”

Speaking the while, they drew near. She Yüeh and her friends then asked them what they were holding in their hands.

“We’re taking over,” they replied, “some things to the two girls: Miss Chin and Miss Hua.”

“They’re still singing the ‘Eight Worthies’ outside,” She Yüeh went on to observe laughingly, “and how is it you’re running again to Miss Chin’s and Miss Hua’s before the ‘Trouble-first moon-box’ has been gone through?”

“Take the lid off,” Pao-yü cried, “and let me see what there’s inside.”

Ch’in Wen and She Yüeh at once approached and uncovered the boxes. The two women promptly stooped, which enabled Pao-yü to see that the contents of the two boxes consisted alike of some of the finest fruits and tea-cakes, which had figured at the banquet, and, nodding his head, he walked off, while She Yüeh and her friend speedily threw the lids down anyhow, and followed in his track.

“Those two dames are pleasant enough,” Pao-yü smiled, “and they know how to speak decently; but it’s they who get quite worn out every day, and they contrariwise say that you’ve got ample to do daily. Now, doesn’t this amount to bragging and boasting?”

“Those two women,” She Yüeh chimed in, “are not bad. But such of them as don’t know what good manners mean are ignorant to a degree of all propriety.”

“You, who know what’s what,” Pao-yü added, “should make allowances for that kind of rustic people. You should pity them; that’s all.”

Speaking, he made his exit out of the garden gate. The matrons had, though engaged in drinking and gambling, kept incessantly stepping out of doors to furtively keep an eye on his movements, so that the moment they perceived Pao-yü appear, they followed him in a body. On their arrival in the covered passage of the reception-hall, they espied two young waiting-maids; the one with a small basin in her hand; the other with a towel thrown over her arm. They also held a bowl and small kettle, and had been waiting in that passage for ever so long.

Ch’iu Wen was the first to hastily stretch out her hand and test the water. “The older you grow,” she cried, “the denser you get! How could one ever use this icy-cold water?”

“Miss, look at the weather!” the young maid replied. “I was afraid the water would get cold. It was really scalding; is it cold now?”

While she made this rejoinder, an old matron was, by a strange coincidence, seen coming along, carrying a jug of hot water. “Dear dame,” shouted the young maid, “come over and pour some for me in here!”

“My dear girl,” the matron responded, “this is for our old mistress to brew tea with. I’ll tell you what; you’d better go and fetch some yourself. Are you perchance afraid lest your feet might grow bigger by walking?”

“I don’t care whose it is,” Ch’iu Wen put in. “If you don’t give me any, I shall certainly empty our old lady’s teapot and wash my hands.”

The old matron turned her head; and, catching sight of Ch’iu Wen, she there and then raised the jug and poured some of the water.

“That will do!” exclaimed Ch’iu Wen. “With all your years, don’t you yet know what’s what? Who isn’t aware that it’s for our old mistress? But would one presume to ask for what shouldn’t be asked for?”

“My eyes are so dim,” the matron rejoined with a smile, “that I didn’t recognise this young lady.”

When Pao-yü had washed his hands, the young maid took the small jug and filled the bowl; and, as she held it in her hand, Pao-yü rinsed his mouth. But Ch’iu Wen and She Yüeh availed themselves likewise of the warm water to have a wash; after which, they followed Pao-yü in.

Pao-yü at once asked for a kettle of warm wine, and, starting from sister-in-law Li, he began to replenish their cups. (Sister-in-law Li and his aunt Hsüeh) pressed him, however, with smiling faces, to take a seat; but his grandmother Chia remonstrated. “He’s only a youngster,” she said, “so let him pour the wine! We must all drain this cup!”

With these words, she quaffed her own cup, leaving no heel-taps. Mesdames

Hsing and Wang also lost no time in emptying theirs; so Mrs. Hsüeh and ‘sister-in-law’ Li had no alternative but to drain their share.

“Fill the cups too of your female cousins, senior or junior,” dowager lady Chia went on to tell Pao-yü. “And you mayn’t pour the wine anyhow. Each of you must swallow every drop of your drinks.”

Pao-yü upon hearing her wishes, set to work, while signifying his assent, to replenish the cups of the several young ladies in their proper gradation. But when he got to Tai-yü, she raised the cup, for she would not drink any wine herself, and applied it to Pao-yü‘s lips. Pao-yü drained the contents with one breath; upon which Tai-yü gave him a smile, and said to him: “I am much obliged to you.”

Pao-yü next poured a cup for her. But lady Feng immediately laughed and expostulated. “Pao-yü!” she cried, “you mustn’t take any cold wine. Mind, your hand will tremble, and you won’t be able tomorrow to write your characters or to draw the bow.”

“I’m not having any cold wine,” Pao-yü replied.

“I know you’re not,” lady Feng smiled, “but I simply warn you.”

After this, Pao-yü finished helping the rest of the inmates inside, with the exception of Chia Jung’s wife, for whom he bade a maid fill a cup. Then emerging again into the covered passage, he replenished the cups of Chia Chen and his companions; after which, he tarried with them for a while, and at last walked in and resumed his former seat.

Presently, the soup was brought, and soon after that the ‘feast of lanterns’ cakes were handed round.

Dowager lady Chia gave orders that the play should be interrupted for a time. “Those young people,” (she said) “are be to pitied! Let them too have some hot soup and warm viands. They then can go on again. Take of every kind of fruit,” she continued, “‘feast of lanterns’ cakes, and other such dainties and give them a few.”

The play was shortly stopped. The matrons ushered in a couple of blind singing-girls, who often came to the house, and put two benches, on the opposite side,

for them. Old lady Chia desired them to take a seat, and banjos and guitars were then handed to them.

“What stories would you like to hear?” old lady Chia inquired of ‘sister-in-law’ Li and Mrs. Hsüeh.

“We don’t care what they are;” both of them rejoined with one voice. “Any will do!”

“Have you of late added any new stories to your stock?” old lady Chia asked.

“We’ve got a new story,” the two girls explained. “It’s about an old affair of the time of the Five Dynasties, which trod down the T’ang dynasty.”

“What’s its title?” old lady Chia inquired.

“It’s called: ‘A Feng seeks a Luan in marriage’: (the male phoenix asks the female phoenix in marriage),” one of the girls answered.

“The title is all very well,” dowager lady Chia proceeded, “but why I wonder was it ever given to it. First tell us its general purport, and if it’s interesting, you can continue.”

“This story,” the girl explained, “treats of the time when the T’ang dynasty was extinguished. There lived then one of the gentry, who had originally been a denizen of Chin Ling. His name was Wang Chun. He had been minister under two reigns. He had, about this time, pleaded old age and returned to his home. He had about his knees only one son, called Wang Hsi-feng.”

When the company heard so far, they began to laugh.

“Now isn’t this a duplicate of our girl Feng’s name?” old lady Chia laughingly exclaimed.

A married woman hurried up and pushed (the girl). “That’s the name of your lady Secunda,” she said, “so don’t use it quite so heedlessly!”

“Go on with your story!” dowager lady Chia shouted.

The girl speedily stood up, smiling the while. “We do deserve death!” she

observed. “We weren’t aware that it was our lady’s worthy name.”

“Why should you be in such fear and trembling?” lady Feng laughed. “Go on! There are many duplicate names and duplicate surnames.”

The girl then proceeded with her story. “In a certain year,” she resumed, “his honour old Mr. Wang saw his son Mr. Wang off for the capital to be in time for the examinations. One day, he was overtaken by a heavy shower of rain and he betook himself into a village for shelter. Who’d have thought it, there lived in this village, one of the gentry, of the name of Li, who had been an old friend of his honour old Mr. Wang, and he kept Mr. Wang junior to put up in his library. This Mr. Li had no son, but only a daughter. This young daughter’s worthy name was Ch’u Luan. She could perform on the lute; she could play chess; and she had a knowledge of books and of painting. There was nothing that she did not understand.”

Old lady Chia eagerly chimed in. “It’s no wonder,” she said, “that the story has been called: ‘A Feng seeks a Luan in marriage,’ ‘(a male phoenix seeks a female phoenix in marriage).’ But you needn’t proceed. I’ve already guessed the denouement. There’s no doubt that Wang Hsi-feng asks for the hand of this Miss Ch’u Luan.”

“Your venerable ladyship must really have heard the story before,” the singing-girl smiled.

“What hasn’t our worthy senior heard?” they all exclaimed. “But she’s quick enough in guessing even unheard of things.”

“All these stories run invariably in one line,” old lady Chia laughingly rejoined. “They’re all about pretty girls and scholars. There’s no fun in them. They abuse people’s daughters in every possible way, and then they still term them nice pretty girls. They’re so concocted that there’s not even a semblance of truth in them. From the very first, they canvass the families of the gentry. If the paterfamilias isn’t a president of a board; then he’s made a minister. The heroine is bound to be as lovable as a gem. This young lady is sure to understand all about letters, and propriety. She knows every thing and is, in a word, a peerless beauty. At the sight of a handsome young man, she pays no heed as to whether he be relation or friend, but begins to entertain thoughts of the primary affair of her life, and forgets her parents and sets her books on one side. She behaves as

neither devil nor thief would: so in what respect does she resemble a nice pretty girl? Were even her brain full of learning, she couldn't be accounted a nice pretty girl, after behaving in this manner! Just like a young fellow, whose mind is well stored with book-lore, and who goes and plays the robber! Now is it likely that the imperial laws would look upon him as a man of parts, and that they wouldn't bring against him some charge of robbery? From this it's evident that those, who fabricate these stories, contradict themselves. Besides, they may, it's true, say that the heroines belong to great families of official and literary status, that they're conversant with propriety and learning and that their honourable mothers too understand books and good manners, but great households like theirs must, in spite of the parents having pleaded old age and returned to their natives places, contain a great number of inmates; and the nurses, maids and attendants on these young ladies must also be many; and how is it then that, whenever these stories make reference to such matters, one only hears of young ladies with but a single close attendant? What can, think for yourselves, all the other people be up to? Indeed, what is said before doesn't accord with what comes afterwards. Isn't it so, eh?"

The party listened to her with much glee. "These criticisms of yours, venerable ancestor," they said, "have laid bare every single discrepancy."

"They have however their reasons," old lady Chia smilingly resumed. "Among the writers of these stories, there are some, who begrudge people's wealth and honours, or possibly those, who having solicited a favour (of the wealthy and honorable), and not obtained the object, upon which their wishes were set, have fabricated lies in order to disparage people. There is moreover a certain class of persons, who become so corrupted by the perusal of such tales that they are not satisfied until they themselves pounce upon some nice pretty girl. Hence is it that, for fun's sake, they devise all these yarns. But how could such as they ever know the principle which prevails in official and literary families? Not to speak of the various official and literary families spoken about in these anecdotes, take now our own immediate case as an instance. We're only such a middle class household, and yet we've got none of those occurrences; so don't let her go on spinning these endless yarns. We must on no account have any of these stories told us! Why, even the maids themselves don't understand any of this sort of language. I've been getting so old the last few years, that I felt unawares quite melancholy whenever the girls went to live far off, so my wont has been to have a few passages recounted to me; but as soon as they got back, I at once put a stop to these things."

‘Sister-in-law’ Li and Mrs. Hsüeh both laughed. “This is just the rule,” they said, “which should exist in great families. Not even in our homes is any of this confused talk allowed to reach the ears of the young people.”

Lady Feng came forward and poured some wine. “Enough, that will do!” she laughed. “The wine has got quite cold. My dear ancestor, do take a sip and moisten your throat with, before you begin again to dilate on falsehoods. What we’ve been having now can well be termed ‘Record of a discussion on falsehoods.’ It has had its origin in this reign, in this place, in this year, in this moon, on this day and at this very season. But, venerable senior, you’ve only got one mouth, so you couldn’t very well simultaneously speak of two families. ‘When two flowers open together,’ the proverb says, ‘one person can only speak of one.’ But whether the stones be true or fictitious, don’t let us say anything more about them. Let’s have the footlights put in order, and look at the players. Dear senior, do let these two relatives have a glass of wine and see a couple of plays; and you can then start arguing about one dynasty after another. Eh, what do you say?”

Saying this, she poured the wine, laughing the while. But she had scarcely done speaking before the whole company were convulsed with laughter. The two singing girls were themselves unable to keep their countenance.

“Lady Secunda,” they both exclaimed, “what a sharp tongue you have! Were your ladyship to take to storytelling, we really would have nowhere to earn our rice.”

“Don’t be in such overflowing spirits,” Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. “There are people outside; this isn’t like any ordinary occasion.”

“There’s only my senior brother-in-law Chen outside,” lady Feng smiled. “And we’ve been like brother and sister from our youth up. We’ve romped and been up to every mischief to this age together. But all on account of my marriage, I’ve had of late years to stand on ever so many ceremonies. Why besides being like brother and sister from the time we were small kids, he’s anyhow my senior brother-in-law, and I his junior sister-in-law. (One among) those twenty four dutiful sons, travestied himself in theatrical costume (to amuse his parents), but those fellows haven’t sufficient spirit to come in some stage togs and try and make you have a laugh, dear ancestor. I’ve however succeeded, after ever so much exertion, in so diverting you as to induce you to eat a little more than you

would, and in putting everybody in good humour; and I should be thanked by one and all of you; it's only right that I should. But can it be that you will, on the contrary, poke fun at me?"

"I've truly not had a hearty laugh the last few days," old lady Chia smiled, "but thanks to the funny things she recounted just now, I've managed to get in somewhat better spirits in here. So I'll have another cup of wine." Then having drunk her wine, "Pao-yü," she went on to say, "come and present a cup to your sister-in-law!"

Lady Feng gave a smile. "There's no use for him to give me any wine," she ventured. "(I'll drink out of your cup,) so as to bring upon myself your longevity, venerable ancestor."

While uttering this response, she raised dowager lady Chia's cup to her lips, and drained the remaining half of the contents; after which, she handed the cup to a waiting-maid, who took one from those which had been rinsed with tepid water, and brought it to her. But in due course, the cups from the various tables were cleared, and clean ones, washed in warm water, were substituted; and when fresh wine had been served round, (lady Feng and the maid) resumed their seats.

"Venerable lady," a singing-girl put in, "you don't like the stories we tell; but may we thrum a song for you?"

"You two," remarked old lady Chia, "had better play a duet of the 'Chiang Chün ling' song: 'the general's command.'"

Hearing her wishes, the two girls promptly tuned their cords, to suit the pitch of the song, and struck up on their guitars.

"What watch of the night is it?" old lady Chia at this point inquired.

"It's the third watch," the matrons replied with alacrity.

"No wonder it has got so chilly and damp!" old lady Chia added.

Extra clothes were accordingly soon fetched by the servants and maids.

Madame Wang speedily rose to her feet and forced a smile. "Venerable senior," she said, "wouldn't it be prudent for you to move on to the stove couch in the

winter apartments? It would be as well. These two relatives are no strangers. And if we entertain them, it will he all right."

"Well, in that case," dowager lady Chia smilingly rejoined, "why shouldn't the whole company adjourn inside? Wouldn't it be warmer for us all?"

"I'm afraid there isn't enough sitting room for every one of us," Madame Wang explained.

"I've got a plan," old lady Chia added. "We can now dispense with these tables. All we need are two or three, placed side by side; we can then sit in a group, and by bundling together it will be both sociable as well as warm."

"Yes, this will be nice!" one and all cried.

Assenting, they forthwith rose from table. The married women hastened to remove the debandade of the banquet. Then placing three large tables lengthways side by side in the inner rooms, they went on to properly arrange the fruits and viands, some of which had been replenished, others changed.

"You must none of you stand on any ceremonies!" dowager lady Chia observed. "If you just listen while I allot you your places, and sit down accordingly, it will be all right!"

Continuing, she motioned to Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li to take the upper seats on the side of honour, and, making herself comfortable on the west, she bade the three cousins Pao-ch'in, Tai-yü and Hsian-yün sit close to her on the left and on the right. "Pao-yü," she proceeded "you must go next to your mother." So presently she put Pao-yü, and Pao-ch'ai and the rest of the young ladies between Mesdames Hsing and Wang. On the west, she placed, in proper gradation, dame Lou, along with Chia Lan, and Mrs. Yu and Li Wan, with Chia Lan, (number two,) between them. While she assigned a chair to Chia Jung's wife among the lower seats, put crosswise. "Brother Chen," old lady Chia cried, "take your cousins and be off! I'm also going to sleep in a little time."

Chia Chen and his associates speedily expressed their obedience, and made, in a body, their appearance inside again to listen to any injunctions she might have to give them.

"Bundle yourself away at once!" shouted dowager lady Chia. "You needn't come

in. We've just sat down, and you'll make us get up again. Go and rest; be quick! Tomorrow, there are to be some more grand doings!" Chia Chen assented with alacrity. "But Jung Erh should remain to replenish the cups," he smiled; "it's only fair that he should."

"Quite so!" answered old lady Chia laughingly. "I forgot all about him."

"Yes!" acquiesced Chia Chen. Then twisting himself round, he led Chia Lien and his companions out of the apartment.

(Chia Chen and Chia Lien) were, of course, both pleased at being able to get away. So bidding the servants see Chia Tsung and Chia Huang to their respective homes, (Chia Chen) arranged with Chia Lien to go in pursuit of pleasure and in quest of fun. But we will now leave them to their own devices without another word.

"I was just thinking," meanwhile dowager lady Chia laughed, "that it would be well, although you people are numerous enough to enjoy yourselves, to have a couple of great-grandchildren present at this banquet, so Jung Erh now makes the full complement. But Jung Erh sit near your wife, for she and you will then make the pair complete."

The wife of a domestic thereupon presented a play-bill.

"We, ladies," old lady Chia demurred, "are now chatting in high glee, and are about to start a romp. Those young folks have, also, been sitting up so far into the night that they must be quite cold, so let the plays alone. Tell them then to have a rest. Yet call our own girls to come and sing a couple of plays on this stage. They too will thus have a chance of watching us a bit."

After lending an ear to her, the married women assented and quitted the room. And immediately finding some servant to go to the garden of Broad Vista and summon the girls, they betook themselves, at the same time, as far as the second gate and called a few pages to wait on them.

The pages went with hurried step to the rooms reserved for the players, and taking with them the various grown-up members of the company, they only left the more youthful behind. Then fetching, in a little time, Wen Kuan and a few other girls, twelve in all, from among the novices in the Pear Fragrance court, they egressed by the corner gate leading out of the covered passage. The matrons

took soft bundles in their arms, as their strength was not equal to carrying boxes. And under the conviction that their old mistress would prefer plays of three or five acts, they had put together the necessary theatrical costumes.

After Wen Kuan and the rest of the girls had been introduced into the room by the matrons, they paid their obeisance, and, dropping their arms against their sides, they stood reverentially.

“In this propitious first moon,” old lady Chia smiled, “won’t your teacher let you come out for a stroll? What are you singing now? The eight acts of the ‘Eight worthies’ recently sung here were so noisy, that they made my head ache; so you’d better let us have something more quiet. You must however bear in mind that Mrs. Hsüeh and Mrs. Li are both people, who give theatricals, and have heard I don’t know how many fine plays. The young ladies here have seen better plays than our own girls; and they have heard more beautiful songs than they. These actresses, you see here now, formed once, despite their youth, part of a company belonging to renowned families, fond of plays; and though mere children, they excel any troupe composed of grown-up persons. So whatever we do, don’t let us say anything disparaging about them. But we must now have something new. Tell Fang Kuan to sing us the ‘Hsün Meng’ ballad; and let only flutes and Pandean pipes be used. The other instruments can be dispensed with.”

“Your venerable ladyship is quite right,” Wen Kuan smiled. “Our acting couldn’t, certainly, suit the taste of such people as Mrs. Hsüeh, Mrs. Li and the young ladies. Nevertheless, let them merely heed our enunciation, and listen to our voices; that’s all.”

“Well said!” dowager lady Chia laughed.

‘Sister-in-law’ Li and Mrs. Hsüeh were filled with delight. “What a sharp girl!” they remarked smilingly. “But do you also try to imitate our old lady by pulling our leg?”

“They’re intended to afford us some ready-at-hand recreation,” old lady Chia smiled. “Besides, they don’t go out to earn money. That’s how it is they are not so much up to the times.” At the close of this remark, she also desired K’uei Kuan to sing the play: ‘Hui Ming sends a letter.’ “You needn’t,” she added, “make your face up. Just sing this couple of plays so as to merely let both those ladies hear a kind of parody of them. But if you spare yourselves the least

exertion, I shall be unhappy."

When they heard this, Wen Kuan and her companions left the apartment and promptly apparelled themselves and mounted the stage. First in order, was sung the 'Hsün Meng;' next, '(Hui Ming) sends a letter;' during which, everybody observed such perfect silence that not so much as the caw of a crow fell on the ear.

"I've verily seen several hundreds of companies," Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, "but never have I come across any that confined themselves to flutes."

"There are some," dowager lady Chia answered. "In fact, in that play acted just now called: 'Love in the western tower at Ch'u Ch'iang,' there's a good deal sung by young actors in unison with the flutes. But lengthy unison pieces of this description are indeed few. This too, however, is purely a matter of taste; there's nothing out of the way about it. When I was of her age," resuming, she pointed at Hsiang-yün, "her grandfather kept a troupe of young actresses. There was among them one, who played the lute so efficiently that she performed the part when the lute is heard in the 'Hsi Hsiang Chi,' the piece on the lute in the 'Yü Ts'an Chi,' and that in the supplementary 'P'i Pa Chi,' on the Mongol flageolet with the eighteen notes, in every way as if she had been placed in the real circumstances herself. Yea, far better than this!"

"This is still rarer a thing!" the inmates exclaimed.

Old lady Chia then shortly called the married women, and bade them tell Wen Kúan and the other girls to use both wind and string instruments and render the piece; 'At the feast of lanterns, the moon is round.'

The women servants received her orders and went to execute them. Chia Jung and his wife meanwhile passed the wine round.

When lady Feng saw dowager lady Chia in most exuberant spirits, she smiled. "Won't it be nice," she said, "to avail ourselves of the presence of the singing girls to pass plum blossom round and have the game of forfeits: 'Spring-happy eyebrow-corners-go-up,' eh?"

"That's a fine game of forfeits!" Old lady Chia cried, with a smile. "It just suits the time of the year."

Orders were therefore given at once to fetch a forfeit drum, varnished black, and ornamented with designs executed with copper tacks. When brought, it was handed to the singing girls to put on the table and rap on it. A twig of red plum blossom was then obtained. “The one in whose hand it is when the drum stops,” dowager lady Chia laughingly proposed, “will have to drink a cup of wine, and to say something or other as well.”

“I’ll tell you what,” lady Feng interposed with a smile. “Who of us can pit herself against you, dear ancestor, who have ever ready at hand whatever you want to say? With the little use we are in this line, won’t there be an absolute lack of fun in our contributions? My idea is that it would be nicer were something said that could be appreciated both by the refined as well as the unrefined. So won’t it be preferable that the person, in whose hands the twig remains, when the drum stops, should crack some joke or other?”

Every one, who heard her, was fully aware what a good hand she had always been at witty things, and how she, more than any other, had an inexhaustible supply of novel and amusing rules of forfeits, ever stocked in her mind, so her suggestion not only gratified the various inmates of the family seated at the banquet, but even filled the whole posse of servants, both old and young, who stood in attendance below, with intense delight. The young waiting-maids rushed with eagerness in search of the young ladies and told them to come and listen to their lady Secunda, who was on the point again of saying funny things. A whole crowd of servant-girls anxiously pressed inside and crammed the room. In a little time, the theatricals were brought to a close, and the music was stopped. Dowager lady Chia had some soup, fine cakes and fruits handed to Wen Kuan and her companions to regale themselves with, and then gave orders to sound the drum. The singing-girls were both experts, so now they beat fast; and now slow. Either slow like the dripping of the remnants of water in a clepsydra. Or quick, as when beans are being sown. Or with the velocity of the pace of a scared horse, or that of the flash of a swift lightning. The sound of the drum came to a standstill abruptly. The twig of plum blossom had just reached old lady Chia, when by a strange coincidence, the rattle ceased. Every one blurted out into a boisterous fit of laughter. Chia Jung hastily approached and filled a cup. “It’s only natural,” they laughingly cried, “that you venerable senior, should be the first to get exhilarated; for then, thanks to you, we shall also come in for some measure of good cheer.”

“To gulp down this wine is an easy job,” dowager lady smiled, “but to crack

jokes is somewhat difficult."

"Your jokes, dear ancestor, are even wittier than those of lady Feng," the party shouted, "so favour us with one, and let's have a laugh!"

"I've nothing out of the way to evoke laughter with," old lady Chia smilingly answered. "Yet all that remains for me to do is to thicken the skin of my antiquated phiz and come out with some joke. In a certain family," she consequently went on to narrate, "there were ten sons; these married ten wives. The tenth of these wives was, however, so intelligent, sharp, quick of mind, and glib of tongue, that her father and mother-in-law loved her best of all, and maintained from morning to night that the other nine were not filial. These nine felt much aggrieved and they accordingly took counsel together. 'We nine,' they said, 'are filial enough at heart; the only thing is that that shrew has the gift of the gab. That's why our father and mother-in-law think her so perfect. But to whom can we go and confide our grievance?' One of them was struck with an idea. 'Let's go tomorrow,' she proposed, 'to the temple of the King of Hell and burn incense. We can then tell the King our grudge and ask him how it was that, when he bade us receive life and become human beings, he only conferred a glib tongue on that vixen and that we were only allotted such blunt mouths?' The eight listened to her plan, and were quite enraptured with it. 'This proposal is faultless!' they assented. On the next day, they sped in a body to the temple of the God of Hell, and after burning incense, the nine sisters-in-law slept under the altar, on which their offerings were laid. Their nine spirits waited with the special purpose of seeing the carriage of the King of Hell arrive; but they waited and waited, and yet he did not come. They were just giving way to despair when they espied Sun Hsing-che, (the god of monkeys), advancing on a rolling cloud. He espied the nine spirits, and felt inclined to take a golden rod and beat them. The nine spirits were plunged in terror. Hastily they fell on their knees, and pleaded for mercy."

"'What are you up to?' Sun Hsing-che inquired."

"The nine women, with alacrity, told him all."

"After Sun Hsing-che had listened to their confidences, he stamped his foot and heaved a sigh. 'Is that the case?' he asked. 'Well, it's lucky enough you came across me, for had you waited for the God of Hell, he wouldn't have known anything about it.'"

“At these assurances, the nine women gave way to entreaties. ‘Great saint,’ they pleaded, ‘if you were to display some commiseration, we would be all right.’”

“Sun Hsing-che smiled. ‘There’s no difficulty in the way,’ he observed. ‘On the day on which you ten sisters-in-law came to life, I was, as luck would have it, on a visit to the King of Hell’s place. So I (saw) him do something on the ground, and the junior sister-of-law of yours lap it up. But if you now wish to become smart and sharp-tongued, the remedy lies in water. If I too were therefore to do something, and you to drink it, the desired effect will be attained.’”

At the close of her story, the company roared with laughter.

“Splendid!” shouted lady Feng. “But luckily we’re all slow of tongue and dull of intellect, otherwise, we too must have had the water of monkeys to drink.”

“Who among us here,” Mrs. Yu and dame Lou smilingly remarked, addressing themselves to Li Wan, “has tasted any monkey’s water. So don’t sham ignorance of things!”

“A joke must hit the point to be amusing,” Mrs. Hsüeh ventured.

But while she spoke, (the girls) began again to beat the drum. The young maids were keen to hear lady Feng’s jokes. They therefore explained to the singing girls, in a confidential tone, that a cough would be the given signal (for them to desist). In no time (the blossom) was handed round on both sides. As soon as it came to lady Feng, the young maids purposely gave a cough. The singing-girl at once stopped short. “Now we’ve caught her!” shouted the party laughingly; “drink your wine, be quick! And mind you tell something nice! But don’t make us laugh so heartily as to get stomachaches.”

Lady Feng was lost in thought. Presently, she began with a smile. “A certain household,” she said, “was celebrating the first moon festival. The entire family was enjoying the sight of the lanterns, and drinking their wine. In real truth unusual excitement prevailed. There were great grandmothers, grandmothers, daughters-in-law, grandsons’ wives, great grandsons, granddaughters, granddaughters-in-law, aunts’ granddaughters, cousins’ granddaughters; and ai-yo-yo, there was verily such a bustle and confusion!”

While minding her story, they laughed. “Listen to all this mean mouth says!” they cried. “We wonder what other ramifications she won’t introduce!”

“If you want to bully me,” Mrs. Yu smiled, “I’ll tear that mouth of yours to pieces.”

Lady Feng rose to her feet and clapped her hands.

“One does all one can to rack one’s brain,” she smiled, “and here you combine to do your utmost to confuse me! Well, if it is so, I won’t go on.”

“Proceed with your story,” old lady Chia exclaimed with a smile. “What comes afterwards?”

Lady Feng thought for a while. “Well, after that,” she continued laughingly, “they all sat together and crammed the whole room. They primed themselves with wine throughout the hours of night and then they broke up.”

The various inmates noticed in what a serious and sedate manner she narrated her story, and none ventured to pass any further remarks, but waited anxiously for her to go on, when they became aware that she coldly and drily came to a stop.

Shih Hsiang-yün stared at her for ever so long.

“I’ll tell you another,” lady Feng laughingly remarked. “At the first moon festival, several persons carried a cracker as large as a room and went out of town to let it off. Over and above ten thousand persons were attracted, and they followed to see the sight. One among them was of an impatient disposition. He could not reconcile himself to wait; so stealthily he snatched a joss-stick and set fire to it. A sound of ‘pu-ch’ih’ was heard. The whole number of spectators laughed boisterously and withdrew. The persons, who carried the cracker, felt a grudge against the cracker-seller for not having made it tight, (and wondered) how it was that every one had left without hearing it go off.”

“Is it likely that the men themselves didn’t hear the report?” Hsiang-yün insinuated.

“Why, the men themselves were deaf,” lady Feng rejoined.

After listening to her, they pondered for a while, and then suddenly they laughed aloud in chorus. But remembering that her first story had been left unfinished, they inquired of her: “What was, after all, the issue of the first story? You should

conclude that too."

Lady Feng gave a rap on the table with her hand. "How vexatious you are!" she exclaimed. "Well, the next day was the sixteenth; so the festivities of the year were over, and the feast itself was past and gone. I see people busy putting things away, and fussing about still, so how can I make out what will be the end of it all?"

At this, one and all indulged in renewed merriment.

"The fourth watch has long ago been struck outside," lady Feng smilingly said. "From what I can see, our worthy senior is also tired out; and we should, like when the cracker was let off in that story of the deaf people, be bundling ourselves off and finish!"

Mrs. Yu and the rest covered their mouths with their handkerchiefs and laughed. Now they stooped forward; and now they bent backward. And pointing at her, "This thing," they cried, "has really a mean tongue."

Old lady Chia laughed. "Yes," she said, "this vixen Feng has, in real truth, developed a meaner tongue than ever! But she alluded to crackers," she added, "so let's also let off a few fireworks so as to counteract the fumes of the wine."

Chia Jung overheard the suggestion. Hurriedly leaving the room, he took the pages with him, and having a scaffolding erected in the court, they hung up the fireworks, and got everything in perfect readiness. These fireworks were articles of tribute, sent from different states, and were, albeit not large in size, contrived with extreme ingenuity. The representations of various kinds of events of antiquity were perfect, and in them were inserted all sorts of crackers.

Lin Tai-yü was naturally of a weak disposition, so she could not stand the report of any loud intonation. Her grandmother Chia therefore clasped her immediately in her embrace. Mrs. Hsüeh, meanwhile, took Hsiang-yün in her arms.

"I'm not afraid," smiled Hsiang-yün.

"Nothing she likes so much as letting off huge crackers," Pao-ch'ai smilingly interposed, "and could she fear this sort of thing?"

Madame Wang, thereupon, laid hold of Pao-yü, and pulled him in her lap.

“We’ve got no one to care a rap for us,” lady Feng laughed.

“I’m here for you,” Mrs. Yu rejoined with a laugh. “I’ll embrace you. There you’re again behaving like a spoilt child. You’ve heard about crackers, and you comport yourself as if you’d had honey to eat! You’re quite frivolous again to-day!”

“Wait till we break up,” lady Feng answered laughing, “and we’ll go and let some off in our garden. I can fire them far better than any of the young lads!”

While they bandied words, one kind of firework after another was lighted outside, and then later on some more again. Among these figured ‘fill-heaven-stars;’ ‘nine dragons-enter-clouds;’ ‘over-whole-land-a- crack-of-thunder;’ ‘fly-up-heavens;’ ‘sound-ten shots,’ and other such small crackers.

The fireworks over, the young actresses were again asked to render the ‘Lotus-flowers-fall,’ and cash were strewn upon the stage. The young girls bustled all over the boards, snatching cash and capering about.

The soup was next brought. “The night is long,” old lady Chia said, “and somehow or other I feel peckish.”

“There’s some congee,” lady Feng promptly remarked, “prepared with duck’s meat.”

“I’d rather have plain things,” dowager lady Chia answered.

“There’s also some congee made with non-glutinous rice and powder of dates. It’s been cooked for the ladies who fast.”

“If there’s any of this, it will do very well,” old lady Chia replied.

While she spoke, orders were given to remove the remnants of the banquet, and inside as well as outside; were served every kind of *recherché* small dishes. One and all then partook of some of these refreshments, at their pleasure, and rinsing their mouths with tea, they afterwards parted.

On the seventeenth, they also repaired, at an early hour, to the Ning mansion to present their compliments; and remaining in attendance, while the doors of the ancestral hall were closed and the images put away, they, at length, returned to

their quarters.

Invitations had been issued on this occasion to drink the new year wine at Mrs. Hsüeh's residence. But dowager lady Chia had been out on several consecutive days, and so tired out did she feel that she withdrew to her rooms, after only a short stay.

After the eighteenth, relatives and friends arrived and made their formal invitations; or else they came as guests to the banquets given. But so little was old lady Chia in a fit state to turn her mind to anything that the two ladies, Madame Hsing and lady Feng, had to attend between them to everything that cropped up. But Pao-yü as well did not go anywhere else than to Wang Tzu-t'eng's, and the excuse he gave out was that his grandmother kept him at home to dispel her ennui.

We need not, however, dilate on irrelevant details. In due course, the festival of the fifteenth of the first moon passed. But, reader, if you have any curiosity to learn any subsequent events, listen to those given in the chapter below.

CHAPTER LV.

The stupid secondary wife, dame Chao, needlessly loses her temper and insults her own daughter, T'an Ch'un. The perverse servant-girls are so full of malice that they look down contemptuously on their youthful mistresses.

We will now resume our narration with the Jung Mansion. Soon after the bustle of the new year festivities, lady Feng who, with the most arduous duties she had had to fulfil both before and after the new year, had found little time to take proper care of herself, got a miscarriage and could not attend to the management of domestic affairs. Day after day two and three doctors came and prescribed for her. But lady Feng had ever accustomed herself to be hardy, so although unable to go out of doors, she nevertheless devised the ways and means for everything, and made the various arrangements she deemed necessary, and whatever concern suggested itself to her mind, she entrusted to P'ing Erh to lay before Madame Wang. But however much people advised her to be careful, she would not lend an ear to them. Madame Wang felt as if she had been deprived of her right arm.

And as she alone had not sufficient energy to see to everything, she bestowed her own attention upon such important affairs, as turned up, and entrusted, for the time being, all miscellaneous domestic matters to the cooperation of Li Wan.

Li Wan had at all times held virtue at a high price, and set but little value on talents of any kind, so that she, as a matter of course, displayed leniency to those who were placed under her. Madame Wang accordingly bade T'an Ch'un combine with Li Wan in the management of the household. "In a month," she argued, "lady Feng will be getting all right again, and then you can once more hand over charge to her."

Little, however, though one would think it, lady Feng was endowed with a poor physique. From her youth up, moreover, she had not known how to husband her health; and emulation and contentiousness had, more than anything else, combined to undermine her vital energies. Hence it was that although her complaint was a simple miscarriage, it had really, after all, been the outcome of loss of vigour. After a month symptoms of emissions of blood began also to show themselves. And notwithstanding her reluctance to utter what she felt every one, at the sight of her sallow and emaciated face, readily concluded that she was not nursing herself as well as she should.

Madame Wang therefore enjoined her merely to take her medicines and look to herself with due care; and she would not allow her to disquiet her mind about the least thing. But (lady Feng) herself also gave way to misgivings lest her illness should assume some grave phase, and much though she laughed with one and all, she was ever mindful to steal time to attend to her health, feeling inwardly vexed at not being able to soon get back her old strength again. But she had, as it happened, to dose herself with medicines and to nurse herself for three whole months, before she gradually began to rally and before the discharges stopped by degrees. But we will abstain from any reference to these details which pertain to the future, suffice it now to add that though Madame Wang noticed her improved state, (she thought it) impossible for the time being for T'an Ch'un and Li Wan to resign their charge. But so fidgetty was she lest with the large number of inmates in the garden proper control should not be exercised that she specially sent for Pao-ch'ai and begged of her to keep an eye over every place, explaining to her that the old matrons were of no earthly use, for whenever they could obtain any leisure, they drank and gambled; and slept during broad daylight, while they played at cards during the hours of night. "I know all about their doings," (she said). "When that girl Feng is well enough to go out, they have

some little fear. But they're bound at present to consult again their own convenience. Yet you, dear child, are one in whom I can repose complete trust. Your brother and your female cousins are, on the one hand, young; and I can, on the other, afford no spare time; so do exert yourself on my behalf for a couple of days, and exercise proper supervision. And should anything unexpected turn up, just come and tell it to me. Don't wait until our old lady inquires about it, as I shall then find myself in a corner with nothing to say in my defence. If those servants aren't on their good behaviour, mind you blow them up; and if they don't listen to you, come and lay your complaint before me; for it will be best not to let anything assume a serious aspect."

Pao-ch'ai listened to her appeal and felt under the necessity of volunteering to undertake the charge.

The season was about the close of spring, so Tai-yü got her cough back again. But Hsiang-yün was likewise laid up in the Heng Wu Yüan, as she too was affected by the weather, and day after day she saw numberless doctors and took endless medicines.

T'an Ch'un and Li Wan lived apart, but as they had of late assumed joint management of affairs, it was, unlike former years, extremely inconvenient even for the servants to go backwards and forwards to make their reports. They consequently resolved that they should meet early every day in the small three-roomed reception-hall, at the south side of the garden gate, to transact what business there was, and that their morning meal over, they should after noon return again to their quarters.

This three-roomed hall had originally been got ready at the time of the visit of the imperial consort to her parents, to accommodate the attendants and eunuchs. This visit over, it proved, therefore, no longer of use, and the old matrons simply came to it every night to keep watch. But mild weather had now set in, and any complete fittings were quite superfluous. All that could be seen about amounted to a few small pieces of furniture just sufficient for them to make themselves comfortable with. Over this hall was likewise affixed a placard, with the inscription in four characters:

"Perfected philanthropy, published virtue!"

Yet the place was generally known among the domestics as 'the discuss-matters-

hall.’ To this hall, (Li Wan and T’an Ch’un) would daily adjourn at six in the morning, and leave it at noon, and the wives of the managers and other servants, who had any matters to lay before them, came and went in incessant strings.

When the domestics heard that Li Wan would assume sole control, each and all felt secretly elated; for as Li Wan had always been considerate, forbearing and loth to inflict penalties, she would be, of course, they thought, easier to put off than lady Feng. Even when T’an Ch’un was added, they again remembered that she was only a youthful unmarried girl and that she too had ever shown herself goodnatured and kindly to a degree, so none of them worried their minds about her, and they became considerably more indolent than when they had to deal with lady Feng. But after the expiry of three or four days several concerns passed through her hands, which gave them an opportunity to gradually find out that T’an Ch’un did not, in smartness and thoroughness, yield to lady Feng, and that the only difference between them was that she was soft in speech and gentle in disposition. By a remarkable coincidence, princes, dukes, marquises, earls, and hereditary officials arrived for consecutive days from various parts; all of whom were, if not the relatives of the Jung and Ning mansions, at least their old friends. There were either those who had obtained transfers on promotion, or others who had been degraded; either those, who had married, or those who had gone into mourning, and Madame Wang had so much congratulating and condoling, receiving and escorting to do that she had no time to attend to any entertaining. There was therefore less than ever any one in the front part to look after things. So while (T’an Ch’un and Li Wan) spent their whole days in the hall, Pao-ch’ai tarried all day in the drawing-rooms, to keep an eye over what was going on; and they only betook themselves back to their quarters after Madame Wang’s return. Of a night, they whiled away their leisure hours by doing needlework; but they would, previous to retiring to sleep, get into their chairs, and, taking along with them the servants, whose duty it was to be on night watch in the garden, and other domestics as well, they visited each place on their round. Such was the control exercised by these three inmates that signs were not wanting to prove that greater severity was observed than in the days when the management devolved on lady Feng. To this reason must be assigned the fact that all the servants attached inside as well as outside cherished a secret grudge against them. “No sooner,” they insinuated, “has one patrolling ogre come than they add three more cerberean sort of spring josses so that even at night we’ve got less time than ever to sip a cup of wine and indulge in a romp!”

On the day that Madame Wang was going to a banquet at the mansion of the

Marquis of Chin Hsiang, Li Wan and T’an Ch’un arranged their coiffure and performed their ablutions at an early hour; and after waiting upon her until she went out of doors, they repaired into the hall and installed themselves in their seats. But just as they were sipping their tea, they espied Wu Hsin-teng’s wife walk in. “Mrs. Chao’s brother, Chao Kuo-chi,” she observed, “departed this life yesterday; the tidings have already been reported to our old mistress and our lady, who said that it was all right, and bade me tell you, Miss.”

At the close of this announcement, she respectfully dropped her arms against her body, and stood aloof without adding another word. The servants, who came at this season to lay their reports before (T’an Ch’un and Li Wan), mustered no small number. But they all endeavoured to find out how their two new mistresses ran the household; for as long they managed things properly, one and all willingly resolved to respect them, but in the event of the least disagreement or improper step, not only did they not submit to them, but they also spread, the moment they put their foot outside the second gate, numberless jokes on their account and made fun of them. Wu Hsin-teng’s wife had thus devised an experiment in her own mind. Had she had to deal with lady Feng, she would have long ago made an attempt to show off her zeal by proposing numerous alternatives and discovering various bygone precedents, and then allowed lady Feng to make her own choice and take action; but, in this instance, she looked with such disdain on Li Wan, on account of her simplicity, and on T’an Ch’un, on account of her youthfulness, that she volunteered only a single sentence, in order to put both these ladies to the test, and see what course they would be likely to adopt.

“What shall we do?” T’an Ch’un asked Li Wan.

Li Wan reflected for a while. “The other day,” she rejoined, “that Hsi Jen’s mother died, I heard that she was given forty taels. So now give her forty taels as well and have done!”

Upon hearing this proposal, Wu Hsin-teng’s wife eagerly expressed her acquiescence, by uttering a yes; and taking over the permit she was going on her way at once.

“Come back,” shouted T’an Ch’un.

“Wu Hsing-teng’s wife had perforce to retrace her footsteps.

“Wait, don’t get the money yet,” T’an Ch’un remarked. “I want to ask you something. Some of the old secondary wives, attached years back to our venerable senior’s rooms, lived inside the establishment; others outside; there were these two distinctions between them. Now if any of them died at home, how much was allowed them? And how much was allotted to such as died outside? Tell us what was given in either case for our guidance.”

As soon as Wu Hsin-teng’s wife was asked this question, every detail bearing on the subject slipped from her memory. Hastily forcing a smile, “This is,” she replied, “nothing of any such great consequence. Whether much or little be allowed, who’ll ever venture to raise a quarrel about it?”

T’an Ch’un then smiled. “This is all stuff and nonsense!” she exclaimed. “My idea is that it would be better to give a hundred taels. For if we don’t comply with what’s right, we shall, not to speak of your ridiculing us, find it also a hard job by and bye to face your mistress Secunda.”

“Well, in that case,” laughed Wu Hsin-teng’s wife, “I’ll go and look up the old accounts. I can’t recollect anything about them just at this moment.”

“You’re quite an old hand in the management of affairs,” T’an Ch’un observed with a significant smile, “and can’t you remember, but come instead to perplex us? Whenever you’ve had anything of the kind to lay before your lady Secunda, have you also had to go first and look it up? But if this has been the practice, lady Feng can’t be looked upon as being such a dreadful creature. One could very well call her lenient and kind. Yet don’t you yet hurry to go and hunt them up and bring them to me to see? If we dilly-dally another day, they won’t run you people down for your coarse-mindedness, but we will seem to have been driven to our wits’ ends!”

Wu Hsin-teng’s wife got quite scarlet in the face. Promptly twisting herself round, she quitted the hall; while the whole bevy of married women stretched out their tongues significantly.

During her absence, other matters were reported. But in a little while, Wu Hsin-teng’s wife returned with the old accounts. On inspection, T’an Ch’un found that for a couple of secondary wives, who had lived in the establishment, twenty-four taels had been granted, and that for two, whose quarters had been outside, forty taels had in each case been allowed. Besides these two, others were mentioned,

who had lived outside the mansion; to one of whom a hundred taels had been given, and to the other, sixty taels. Under these two records, the reasons were assigned. In the one case, the coffins of father and mother had had to be removed from another province, and sixty taels extra had consequently been granted. In the other, an additional twenty taels had been allowed, as a burial-place had to be purchased at the time.

T’an Ch’un handed the accounts to Li Wan for her perusal.

“Give her twenty taels,” readily suggested T’an Ch’un. “Leave these accounts here for us to examine minutely.”

Wu Hsin-teng’s wife then walked away. But unexpectedly Mrs. Chao entered the hall. Li Wan and T’an Ch’un speedily pressed her to take a seat.

Mrs. Chao then broke the silence. “All the inmates of these rooms have trampled me under heel,” she said, “but never mind! Yet, my child, just ponder, it is only fair that you should take my part.”

While ventilating her grievances, her eyes got moist, her nose watered, and she began to sob.

“To whom are you alluding Mrs. Chao?” T’an Ch’un hastily inquired. “I can’t really make out what you’re driving at. Who tramples you under foot? Speak out and I’ll take up your cudgels.”

“You’re now trampling me down yourself, young lady,” Mrs. Chao observed. “And to whom can I go and tell my grievance?”

T’an Ch’un, at these words, jumped up with alacrity. “I never would presume to do any such thing,” she protested.

Li Wan too vehemently sprung to her feet to proffer her some good counsel.

“Pray seat yourselves, both of you,” Mrs. Chao cried, “and listen to what I have to say. I’ve had, like simmering oil, to consume away in these rooms to this advanced age. There’s also your brother besides. Yet I can’t compare myself now even to Hsi Jen, and what credit do I enjoy? But you haven’t as well any face, so don’t let’s speak of myself.”

“It was really on account of this,” T’an Ch’un smiled, “that I said that I didn’t presume to disregard right and to violate propriety.”

While she spoke, she resumed her seat, and taking up the accounts, she turned them over for Mrs. Chao to glance at, after which she read them out to her for her edification. “These are old customs,” she proceeded, “enforced by the seniors of the family, and every one complies with them, and could I ever, pray, have changed them? These will hold good not only with Hsi Jen; but even when by and bye Huan-erh takes a concubine, the same course will naturally be adopted as in the case of Hsi Jen. This is no question for any large quarrels or small disputes, and no mention should be made about face or no face. She’s our Madame Wang’s servant-girl, and I’ve dealt with her according to a longstanding precedent. Those who say that I’ve taken suitable action will come in for our ancestors’ bounty and our lady’s bounty as well. But should any one uphold that I’ve adopted an unfair course, that person is devoid of all common sense and totally ignorant of what a blessing means. The only thing she can do is to foster as much resentment as she chooses. Our lady, Madame Wang, may even give a present of a house to any one; what credit is that to me? Again, she may not give a single cash, but even that won’t imply any loss of face, as far as I am concerned. What I have to say is that as Madame Wang is away from home, you should quietly look after yourself a bit. What’s the good of worrying and fretting? Our lady is extremely fond of me; and, if, at different times, a chilliness has sprung up on her part, it’s because you, Mrs. Chao, have again and again been officious. Had I been a man and able to have gone abroad, I would long ago have run away and started some business. I would then have had something of my own to attend to. But, as it happens, I am a girl, so that I can’t even recklessly utter so much as a single remark. Madame Wang is well aware of it in her heart. And it’s now because she entertains a high opinion of me that she recently bade me assume the charge of domestic affairs. But before I’ve had time enough to do a single good act, here you come, Mrs. Chao, to lay down the law. If this reaches Madame Wang’s ear, I fear I shall get into trouble. She won’t let me exercise any control, and then I shall, in real earnest, come in for no face. But even you, Mrs. Chao, will then actually lose countenance.”

Reasoning with her, she so little could repress her tears that they rolled down her cheeks.

Mrs. Chao had not a word more to say to refute her arguments with. “If Madame Wang loves you,” she simply responded, “there’s still more reason why you

should have drawn us into her favour. (Instead of that), all you think about is to try and win Madame Wang's affections, and you forget all about us."

"How ever did I forget you?" T'an Ch'un exclaimed. "How would you have me drag you into favour? Go and ask every one of them, and you'll see what mistress is indifferent to any one, who exerts her energies and makes herself useful, and what worthy person requires being drawn into favour?"

Li Wan, who stood by, did her best to pacify them with her advice. "Mrs. Chao," she argued, "don't lose your temper! Neither should you feel any ill-will against this young lady of yours. Had she even at heart every good intention to lend you a hand, how could she put it into words?"

"This worthy senior dame," T'an Ch'un impatiently interposed, "has also grown quite dense! Whom could I drag into favour? Why, in what family, do the young ladies give a lift to slave-girls? Their qualities as well as defects should all alike be well known to you people. And what have they got to do with me?"

Mrs. Chao was much incensed. "Who tells you," she asked, "to give a lift to any one? Were it not that you looked after the house, I wouldn't have come to inquire anything of you. But anything you may suggest is right; so had you, now that your maternal uncle is dead, granted twenty or thirty taels in excess, is it likely that Madame Wang would not have given you her consent? It's evident that our Madame Wang is a good woman and that it's you people who are mean and stingy. Unfortunately, however, her ladyship has with all her bounty no opportunity of exercising it. You could, my dear girl, well set your mind at ease. You wouldn't, in this instance, have had to spend any of your own money; and at your marriage by and bye, I would still have borne in mind the exceptional regard you had shown the Chao family. But now that you've got your full plumage, you've forgotten your extraction, and chosen a lofty branch to fly to."

Before T'an Ch'un had heard her to the end, she flew into such a rage that her face blanched; and choking for breath, she gasped and panted. Sobbing, she asked the while: "Who's my maternal uncle? My maternal uncle was at the end of the year promoted to be High Commissioner of the Nine Provinces! How can another maternal uncle have cropped up? It's because I've ever shown that reverence enjoined by the rites that other relatives have now more than ever turned up. If what you say be the case, how is it that every day that Huan-erh goes out, Chao Kuo-chi too stands up, and follows him to school? Why doesn't

he put on the airs of an uncle? What's the reason that he doesn't? Who isn't aware of the fact that I'm born of a concubine? Would it require two or three months' time to trace my extraction? But the fact is you've come to kick up all this hullaballoo for fear lest people shouldn't be alive to the truth; and with the express design of making it public all over the place! But I wonder who of us two will make the other lose face? Luckily, I've got my wits about me; for had I been a stupid creature ignorant of good manners, I would long ago have lost all patience."

Li Wan was much concerned, but she had to continue to exhort them to desist. But Mrs. Chao proceeded with a long rigmarole until a servant was unexpectedly heard to report that lady Secunda had sent Miss Ping to deliver a message. Mrs. Chao caught the announcement, and eventually held her peace, when they espied P'ing erh making her appearance. Mrs. Chao hastily forced a saturnine smile, and motioned to her to take a seat. "Is your lady any better?" she went on to inquire with vehemence. "I was just thinking of going to look her up; but I could find no leisure!"

Upon seeing P'ing Erh enter, Li Wan felt prompted to ask her the object of her visit.

"My lady says," P'ing Erh smilingly responded, "that she apprehends, now that Mrs. Chao's brother is dead, that your ladyship and you, miss, are not aware of the existence of an old precedent. According to the ordinary practice no more need be given than twenty taels; but she now requests you, miss, to consider what would be best to do; if even you add a good deal more, it will do well enough."

T'an Ch'un at once wiped away all traces of tears. "What's the use of another addition, when there's no valid reason for it?" she promptly demurred. "Who has again been twenty months in the womb? Or is it forsooth any one who's gone to the wars, and managed to escape with his life, carrying his master on his back? Your mistress is certainly very ingenious! She tells me to disregard the precedent, in order that she should pose as a benefactress! She wishes to take the money, which Madame Wang spurns, so as to reap the pleasure of conferring favours! Just you tell her that I could not presume to add or reduce anything, or even to adopt any reckless decision. Let her add what she wants and make a display of bounty. When she gets better and is able to come out, she can effect whatever additions she fancies."

The moment P’ing Erh arrived, she obtained a fair insight (into lady Feng’s designs), so when she heard the present remarks, she grasped a still more correct idea of things. But perceiving an angry look about T’an Ch’un’s face, she did not have the temerity to behave towards her as she would, had she found her in the high spirits of past days. All she did therefore was to stand aloof with her arms against her sides and to wait in rigid silence. Just at that moment, however, Pao-ch’ai dropped in, on her return from the upper rooms. T’an Ch’un quickly rose to her feet, and offered her a seat. But before they had had time to exchange any words, a married woman likewise came to report some business.

But as T’an Ch’un had been having a good cry, three or four young maids brought her a basin, towel, and hand-glass and other articles of toilette. T’an Ch’un was at the moment seated cross-legged, on a low wooden couch, so the maid with the basin had, when she drew near, to drop on both her knees and lift it high enough to bring it within reach. The other two girls prostrated themselves next to her and handed the towels and the rest of the toilet things, which consisted of a looking-glass, rouge and powder. But P’ing Erh noticed that Shih Shu was not in the room, and approaching T’an Ch’un with hasty step, she tucked up her sleeves for her and unclasped her bracelets. Seizing also a large towel from the hands of one of the maids, she covered the lapel on the front part of T’an Ch’un’s dress; whereupon T’an Ch’un put out her hands, and washed herself in the basin.

“My lady and miss,” the married woman observed, “may it please you to pay what has been spent in the family school for Mr. Chia Huan and Mr.. Chia Lan during the year.”

P’ing Erh was the first to speak. “What are you in such a hurry for?” she cried. “You’ve got your eyes wide open, and must be able to see our young lady washing her face; instead of coming forward to wait on her, you start talking! Do you also behave in this blind sort of way in the presence of your lady Secunda? This young lady is, it’s true, generous and lenient, but I’ll go and report you to your mistress. I’ll simply tell her that you people have no eye for Miss T’an Ch’un. But when you find yourselves in a mess, don’t bear me any malice.”

At this hint the woman took alarm, and hastily forcing a smile, she pleaded guilty. “I’ve been rude,” she exclaimed. With these words, she rushed with all despatch out of the room.

T’an Ch’un smoothed her face. While doing so, she turned herself towards P’ing Erh and gave her a cynical smile. “You’ve come just one step too late,” she remarked. “You weren’t in time to see something laughable! Even sister Wu, an old hand at business though she be, failed to look up clearly an old custom and came to play her tricks on us. But when we plied her with questions, she luckily had the face to admit that it had slipped from her memory. ‘Do you,’ I insinuated, ‘also forget, when you’ve got anything to report to lady Secunda? and have you subsequently to go and hunt up all about it?’ Your mistress can’t, I fancy, be so patient as to wait while she goes and institutes proper search.”

P’ing Erh laughed. “Were she to have behaved but once in this wise,” she observed, “I feel positive that a couple of the tendons of her legs would have long ago been snapped. But, Miss, don’t credit all they say. It’s because they see that our senior mistress is as sweet-tempered as a ‘P’u-sa,’ and that you, miss, are a modest young lady, that they, naturally, shirk their duties and come and take liberties with you. Your mind is set upon playing the giddy dogs,” continuing, she added; speaking towards those beyond the doorway; “but when your mistress gets quite well again, we’ll tell her all.”

“You’re gifted with the greatest perspicacity, miss,” the married women, standing outside the door, smiled in chorus. “The proverb says: ‘the person who commits a fault must be the one to suffer.’ We don’t in any way presume to treat any mistress with disdain. Our mistress at present is in delicate health, and if we intentionally provoke her, may we, when we die, have no place to have our corpses interred in.”

P’ing Erh laughed a laugh full irony. “So long as you’re aware of this, it’s well and good,” she said. And smiling a saturnine smile, she resumed, addressing herself to T’an Ch’un: “Miss, you know very well how busy our lady has been and how little she could afford the time to keep this tribe of people in order. Of course, they couldn’t therefore, be prevented from becoming remiss. The adage has it: ‘Lookers-on are clear of sight!’ During all these years that you, have looked on dispassionately, there have possibly been instances on which, though additions or reductions should have been made, our lady Secunda has not been able to effect them, so, miss, do add or curtail whatever you may deem necessary, in order that, first, Madame Wang may be benefited, and that, secondly, you mayn’t too render nugatory the kindness with which you ever deal towards our mistress.”

But scarcely had she finished, than Pao-ch'ai and Li Wan smilingly interposed. "What a dear girl!" they ejaculated. "One really can't feel angry with that hussy Feng for being partial to her and fond of her. We didn't, at first, see how we could very well alter anything by any increase or reduction, but after what you've told us, we must hit upon one or two things and try and devise means to do something, with a view of not showing ourselves ungrateful of the advice you've tendered us."

"My heart was swelling with indignation," T'an Ch'un observed laughing, "and I was about to go and give vent to my temper with her mistress, but now that she (P'ing Erh) has happened to come, she has, with a few words, quite dissuaded me from my purpose."

While she spoke, she called the woman, who had been with them a few minutes back, to return into the room. "For what things for Mr. Chia Huan and Mr. Chia Lau was the money expended during the year in the family school?" she inquired of her.

"For cakes," replied the woman, "they ate during the year at school; or for the purchase of paper and pens. Each one of them is allowed eight taels."

"The various expenses on behalf of the young men," T'an Ch'un added, "are invariably paid in monthly instalments to the respective households. For cousin Chia Huan's, Mrs. Chao receives two taels. For Pao-yü's, Hsi Jen draws two taels from our venerable senior's suite of apartments. For cousin Chia Lan's, some one, in our senior lady's rooms, gets the proper allowance. So how is it that these extra eight taels have to be disbursed at school for each of these young fellows? Is it really for these eight taels that they go to school? But from this day forth I shall put a stop to this outlay. So P'ing Erh, when you get back, tell your mistress that I say that this item must absolutely be done away with."

"This should have been done away with long ago," P'ing Erh smiled. "Last year our lady expressed her intention to eliminate it, but with the endless things that claimed her attention about the fall of the year, she forgot all about it."

The woman had no other course than to concur with her views and to walk away. But the married women thereupon arrived from the garden of Broad Vista with the boxes of eatables. So Shih Shu and Su Yün at once brought a small dining-table, and P'ing Erh began to fuss about laying the viands on it.

“If you’ve said all you had,” T’an Ch’un laughed, “you’d better be off and attend to your business. What’s the use of your bustling about here?”

“I’ve really got nothing to do,” P’ing Erh answered smiling. “Our lady Secunda sent me first, to deliver a message; and next, because she feared that the servants in here weren’t handy enough. The fact is, she bade me come and help the girls wait on you, my lady, and on you, miss.”

“Why don’t you bring Mrs. Pao’s meal so that she should have it along with us?” T’an Ch’un then inquired.

As soon as the waiting-maids heard her inquiry, they speedily rushed out and went under the eaves. “Go,” they cried, directing the married women, “and say that Miss Pao-ch’ai would like to have her repast just now in the hall along with the others, and tell them to send the eatables here.”

T’an Ch’un caught their directions. “Don’t be deputing people to go on reckless errands!” she vociferated. “Those are dames, who manage important matters and look after the house, and do you send them to ask for eatables and inquire about tea? You haven’t even the least notion about gradation. P’ing Erh is standing here, so tell her to go and give the message.”

P’ing Erh immediately assented, and issued from the room, bent upon going on the errand. But the married women stealthily pulled her back. “How could you, miss, be made to go and tell them?” they smiled. “We’ve got some one here, who can do so!”

So saying, they dusted one of the stone steps with their handkerchiefs. “You’ve been standing so long,” they observed, “that you must feel quite tired. Do sit in this sunny place and have a little rest.”

P’ing Erh took a seat on the step. Two matrons attached to the tea-room then fetched a rug and spread it out for her. “It’s cold on those stones,” they ventured; “this is, as clean as it can be. So, miss, do make the best of it, and use it!”

P’ing Erh hastily forced a smile. “Many thanks,” she replied.

Another matron next brought her a cup of fine new tea. “This isn’t the tea we ordinarily drink,” she quietly smiled. “This is really for entertaining the young ladies with. Miss, pray moisten your mouth with some.”

P’ing Erh lost no time in bending her body forward and taking the cup. Then pointing at the company of married women, she observed in a low voice: “You’re all too fond of trouble! The way you’re going on won’t do at all! She (T’an Ch’un) is only a young girl, so she is loth to show any severity, or display any temper. This is because she’s full of respect. Yet you people look down on her and insult her. Should she, however, be actually provoked into any violent fit of anger, people will simply say that her behaviour was rather rough, and all will be over. But as for you, you’ll get at once into endless trouble. Even though she might show herself somewhat wilful, Madame Wang treats her with considerable forbearance, and lady Secunda too hasn’t the courage to meddle with her; and do you people have such arrogance as to look down on her? This is certainly just as if an egg were to go and bang itself against a stone!”

“When were we ever so audacious?” the servants exclaimed with one voice. “This fuss is all the work of Mrs. Chao!”

“Never mind about that!” P’ing Erh urged again in an undertone. “My dear ladies, ‘when a wall falls, every one gives it a shove.’ That Mrs. Chao has always been rather topsy-turvey in her ways, and done things by halves; so whenever there has been any rumpus, you’ve invariably shoved the blame on to her shoulders. Never have you had any regard for any single person. Your designs are simply awful! Is it likely that all these years that I’ve been here, I haven’t come to know of them? Had our lady Secunda mismanaged things just a little bit, she would have long ago been run down by every one of you, ladies! Even such as she is, you would, could you only get the least opportunity, be ready to place her in a fix! And how many, many times hasn’t she been abused by you?”

“She’s dreadful,” one and all of them rejoined. “You all live in fear and trembling of her. But we know well enough that no one could say that she too does not in the depths of her heart entertain some little dread for the lot of you. The other day, we said, in talking matters over, that things could not go on smoothly from beginning to end, and that some unpleasantness was bound to happen. Miss Tertia is, it’s true, a mere girl, and you’ve always treated her with little consideration, but out of that company of senior and junior young ladies, she is the only soul whom our lady Secunda funks to some certain extent. And yet you people now won’t look up to her.”

So speaking Ch’iu Wen appeared to view. The married women ran up to her and inquired after her health. “Miss,” they said, “do rest a little. They’ve had their

meal served in there, so wait until things have been cleared away, before you go and deliver your message."

"I'm not like you people," Ch'iu Wen smiled. "How can I afford to wait?"

With these words on her lips, she was about to go into the hall, when P'ing Erh quickly called her back. Ch'iu Wen, upon turning her head round, caught sight of P'ing Erh. "Have you too," she remarked with a smile, "come here to become something like those guardians posted outside the enclosing walls?"

Retracing, at the same time, her footsteps, she took a seat on the rug, occupied by P'ing Erh.

"What message have you got to deliver?" P'ing Erh gently asked.

"I've got to ask when we can get Pao-yü's monthly allowance and our own too," she responded.

"Is this any such pressing matter?" P'ing Erh answered. "Go back quick, and tell Hsi Jen that my advice is that no concern whatever should be brought to their notice to-day. That every single matter reported is bound to be objected to; and that even a hundred will just as surely be vetoed."

"Why is it?" vehemently inquired Ch'iu Wen, upon hearing this explanation.

P'ing Erh and the other servants then promptly told her the various reasons. "She's just bent," they proceeded, "upon finding a few weighty concerns in order to establish, at the expense of any decent person who might chance to present herself, a precedent of some kind or other so as to fix upon a mode of action, which might help to put down expenses to their proper level, and afford a lesson to the whole household; and why are you people the first to come and bump your heads against the nails? If you went now and told them your errand, it would also reflect discredit upon our venerable old mistress and Madame Wang, were they to pounce upon one or two matters to make an example of you. But if they complied with one or two of your applications, others will again maintain 'that they are inclined to favour this one and show partiality to that one; that as you had your old mistress' and Madame Wang's authority to fall back upon, they were afraid and did not presume to provoke their displeasure; that they only avail themselves of soft-natured persons to make scapegoats of.' Just mark my words! She even means to raise objections in one or two matters connected with

our lady Secunda, in order to be the better able to shut up people's mouths."

Ch'iu Wen listened to her with patient ear; and then stretching out her tongue, "It's lucky enough you were here, sister P'ing," she smiled; "otherwise, I would have had my nose well rubbed on the ground. I shall seize the earliest opportunity and give the lot of them a hint."

While replying, she immediately rose to her feet and took leave of them. Soon after her departure, Pao-ch'ai's eatables arrived, and P'ing Erh hastened to enter and wait on her. By that time Mrs. Chao had left, so the three girls seated themselves on the wooden bed, and went through their repast. Pao-ch'ai faced the south. T'an Ch'un the west. Li Wan the east. The company of married women stood quietly under the verandah ready to answer any calls. Within the precincts of the chamber, only such maids remained in waiting as had ever been their closest attendants. None of the other servants ventured, of their own accord, to put their foot anywhere inside.

The married women (meanwhile) discussed matters in a confidential whisper. "Let's do our downright best to save trouble," they argued. "Don't let us therefore harbour any evil design, for even dame Wu will, in that case, be placed in an awkward fix. And can we boast of any grand honours to expect to fare any better?"

While they stood on one side, and held counsel together, waiting for the meal to be over to make their several reports, they could not catch so much as the caw of a crow inside the rooms. Neither did the clatter of bowls and chopsticks reach their ears. But presently, they discerned a maid raise the frame of the portiere as high as she could, and two other girls bring the table out. In the tea-room, three maids waited with three basins in hand. The moment they saw the dining-table brought out, all three walked in. But after a brief interval, they egressed with the basins and rinsing cups. Shih Shu, Su Yün and Ying Erh thereupon entered with three covered cups of tea, placed in trays. Shortly however these three girls also made their exit. Shih Shu then recommended a young maid to be careful and attend to the wants (of their mistresses). "When we've had our rice," she added, "we'll come and relieve you. But don't go stealthily again and sit down!"

The married women at length delivered their reports in a quiet and orderly manner; and as they did not presume to be as contemptuous and offhandish as they had been before, T'an Ch'un eventually cooled down.

“I’ve got something of moment,” she then observed to P’ing Erh, “about which I would like to consult your mistress. Happily, I remembered it just now, so come back as soon as you’ve had your meal. Miss Pao-ch’ai is also here at present, so, after we four have deliberated together, you can carefully ask your lady whether action is to be taken accordingly or not.”

P’ing Erh acquiesced and returned to her quarters. “How is it,” inquired lady Feng, “that you’ve been away such an age?”

P’ing Erh smiled and gave her a full account of what had recently transpired.

“What a fine, splendid girl Miss Tertia is!” she laughingly ejaculated. “What I said was quite right! The only pity is that she should have had such a miserable lot as not to have been born of a primary wife.”

“My lady, you’re also talking a lot of trash!” P’ing Erh smiled. “She, mayn’t be Madame Wang’s child, but is it likely that any one would be so bold as to point the finger of scorn at her, and not treat her like the others?”

Lady Feng sighed. “How could you know everything?” she remarked. “She is, of course, the offspring of a concubine, but as a mere girl, she can’t be placed on the same footing as a man! By and bye, when any one aspires to her hand, the sort of supercilious parties, who now tread the world, will, as a first step, ask whether this young lady is the child of a No. 1 or No. 2 wife. And many of these won’t have anything to say to her, as she is the child, of a No. 2. But really people haven’t any idea that, not to speak of her as the offspring of a secondary wife, she would be, even as a mere servant-girl of ours, far superior than the very legitimate daughter of any family. Who, I wonder, will in the future be so devoid of good fortune as to break off the match; just because he may be inclined to pick and choose between a wife’s child and a concubine’s child? And who, I would like to know, will be that lucky fellow, who’ll snatch her off without any regard to No. 1 and No. 2?”

Continuing, she resumed, turning smilingly towards P’ing Erh, “You know well enough how many ways and means I’ve had all these years to devise in order to effect retrenchment, and how there isn’t, I may safely aver, a single soul in the whole household, who doesn’t detest me behind my back. But now that I’m astride on the tiger’s back, (I must go on; for if I put my foot on the ground, I shall be devoured). It’s true, my tactics have been more or less seen through, but

there’s no help for it; I can’t very well become more open-handed in a moment! In the second place, much goes out at home, and little comes in; and the hundred and one, large and small, things, which turn up, are still managed with that munificence so characteristic of our old ancestors. But the funds, that come in throughout the year, fall short of the immense sums of past days. And if I try again to effect any savings people will laugh at me, our venerable senior and Madame Wang suffer wrongs, and the servants abhor me for my stinginess. Yet, if we don’t seize the first opportunity to think of some plan for enforcing retrenchment, our means will, in the course of a few more years, be completely exhausted.”

“Quite so!” assented P’ing Erh. “By and bye, there will be three or four daughters and two or three more sons added; and our old mistress won’t be able, singlehanded, to meet all this heavy outlay.”

“I myself entertain fears on the same score,” lady Feng smiled. “But, after all, there will be ample. For when Pao-yü and cousin Lin get married, there won’t be any need to touch a cent of public money, as our old lady has her own private means, and she can well fork out some. Miss Secunda is the child of your senior master yonder, and she too needn’t be taken into account. So there only remain three or four, for each of whom one need only spend, at the utmost, ten thousand taels. Cousin Huan will marry in the near future; and if an outlay of three thousand taels prove insufficient, we will be able, by curtailing the bandoline, used in those rooms for smoothing the hair with, make both ends meet. And should our worthy senior’s end come about, provision for everything is already made. All that we’ll have to do will be to spend some small sum for a few miscellaneous trifles; and three to five thousand taels will more than suffice. So with further economies at present, there will be plenty for all our successive needs. The only fear is lest anything occur at an unforeseen juncture; for then it will be dreadful! But don’t let us give way to apprehensions with regard to the future! You’d better have your rice; and when you’ve done, be quick and go and hear what they mean to treat about in their deliberations. I must now turn this opportunity to the best account. I was only this very minute lamenting that I had no help at my disposal. There’s Pao-yü, it’s true, but he too is made of the same stuff as the rest of them in here. Were I even to get him under my thumb, it would be of no earthly use whatever. Senior lady is as goodnatured as a joss; and she likewise is no good. Miss Secunda is worse than useless. Besides, she doesn’t belong to this place. Miss Quarta is only a child. That young fellow Lan and Huan-erh are, more than any of the others, like frozen kittens with frizzled

coats. They only wait to find some warm hole in a stove into which they may poke themselves! Really from one and the same womb have been created two human beings (T'an Ch'un and Chia Huan) so totally unlike each other as the heavens are distant from the earth. But when I think of all this, I feel quite angry! Again, that girl Lin and Miss Pao are both deserving enough, but as they also happen to be our connexions, they couldn't very well be put in charge of our family affairs. What's more, the one resembles a lantern, decorated with nice girls, apt to spoil so soon as it is blown by a puff of wind. The other has made up her mind not to open her month in anything that doesn't concern her. When she's questioned about anything, she simply shakes her head, and repeats thrice: 'I don't know,' so that it would be an extremely difficult job to go and ask her to lend a helping hand. There's only therefore Miss Tertia, who is as sharp of mind as of tongue. She's besides a straightforward creature in this household of ours and Madame Wang is attached to her as well. It's true that she outwardly makes no display of her feelings for her, but it's all that old thing Mrs. Chao, who has done the mischief, for, in her heart, she actually holds her as dear as she does Pao-yü. She's such a contrast to Huan-erh! He truly makes it hard for any one to care a rap for him. Could I have had my own way, I would long ere this have packed him out of the place. But since she (T'au Ch'un) has now got this idea into her mind, we must cooperate with her. For if we can afford each other a helping hand, I too won't be singlehanded and alone. And as far as every right principle, eternal principle, and honesty of purpose go, we shall with such a person as a helpmate, be able to save ourselves considerable anxiety, and Madame Wang's interests will, on the other hand, derive every advantage. But, as far as unfairness and bad faith go, I've run the show with too malicious a hand, and I must turn tail and draw back from my old ways. When I review what I've done, I find that if I still push my tyrannical rule to the bitter end, people will hate me most relentlessly; so much so, that under their smiles they'll harbour daggers, and much though we two may then be able to boast of having four eyes and two heads between us, they'll compass our ruin, when they can at any moment find us off our guard. We should therefore make the best of this crisis, so that as soon as she takes the initiative and sets things in order, all that tribe of people may for a time lose sight of the bitter feelings they cherish against us, for the way we've dealt with them in the past. But there's another thing besides. I naturally know the great talents you possess, but I feel mistrust lest you should, by your own wits, not be able to bring things round. I enjoin these things then on you, now, for although a mere girl she has everything at her fingers' ends. The only thing is that she must try and be wary in speech. She's besides so much better read than I am that she's a harder nut to crack. Now the

proverb says: ‘in order to be able to catch the rebels, you must first catch their chief.’ So if she’s at present disposed to mature some plan and set to work to put it into practice, she’ll certainly have to first and foremost make a start with me. In the event consequently of her raising objections to anything I’ve done, mind you don’t begin any dispute with her. The more virulent she is in her censure of me, the more deferential you should be towards her. That’s your best plan. And whatever you do, don’t imagine that I’m afraid of any loss of face. But the moment you flare up with her, things won’ go well……”

P’ing Erh did not allow her time to conclude her argument. “You’re too much disposed to treat us as simpletons!” she smiled. “I’ve already carried out your wishes, and do you now enjoin all these things on me?”

Lady Feng smiled. “It’s because,” she resumed, “I feared lest you, who have your eyes and mouth so full of me, and only me, might be inclined to show no regard whatever for her, that’s why. I couldn’t, therefore, but tender you the advice I did. But since you’ve already done what I wanted you to do, you’ve shown yourself far sharper than I am. There’s nothing in this to drive you into another tantrum, and to make that mouth of yours begin to chatter away so much about ‘you and I,’ ‘you and I’ !”

“I’ve actually addressed you as ‘you’ ;” P’ing Erh rejoined; “but if you be displeased at it, isn’t this a case of a slap on the mouth? You can very well give me another one, for is it likely that this phiz of mine hasn’t as yet tasted any, pray?”

“What a vixen you are!” lady Feng said smilingly. “How many faults will you go on picking out, before you shut up? You see how ill I am, and yet you come to rub me the wrong way. Come and sit down; for you and I can at all events have our meal together when there is no one to break in upon us. It’s only right that we should.”

While these remarks dropped from her lips, Feng Erh and some three or four other maids entered the room and laid the small stovecouch table. Lady Feng only ate some birds’ nests’ soup and emptied two small plates of some recherché light viands; for she had long ago temporarily reduced her customary diet.

Feng Erh placed the four kinds of eatables allotted to P’ing Erh on the table. After which, she filled a bowl of rice for her. Then with one leg bent on the edge

of the stovecouch, while the other rested on the ground, P’ing Erh kept lady Feng company during her repast; and waiting on her, afterwards, until she finished rinsing her mouth, she issued certain directions to Feng Erh, and crossed over at length to T’an Ch’un’s quarters. Here she found the courtyard plunged in perfect stillness, for the various inmates, who had been assembled there, had already taken their leave.

But, reader, do you wish to follow up the story? If so, listen to the circumstances detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LVI.

The clever T’an Ch’un increases their income and removes longstanding abuses. The worthy Pao-ch’ai preserves intact, by the display of a little intelligence, the great reputation enjoyed by the Chia family.

But let us pick up the clue of our story. P’ing Erh bore lady Feng company during her meal; then attending to her, while she rinsed her mouth and washed her hands, she betook herself eventually to T’an Ch’un’s quarters, where she discovered the courtyard in perfect stillness. Not a soul was about beyond several maids, matrons and close attendants of the inner rooms, who stood outside the windows on the alert to obey any calls. P’ing Erh stepped into the hall. The two cousins and their sister-in-law were all three engaged in discussing some domestic affairs. They were talking about the feast, to which they had been invited during the new year festivities by Lai Ta’s wife, and various details in connection with the garden she had in her place. But as soon as she (P’ing Erh) appeared on the scene, T’an Ch’un desired her to seat herself on her footstool.

“What was exercising my mind,” she thereupon observed, “confines itself to this. I was computing that the head-oil, and rouge and powder, we use during the course of a month, are also a matter of a couple of taels; and I was thinking that what with the sum of two taels, already allotted us every month, and the extra monthly amount given as well to the maids, allowances are, with the addition again of that of eight taels for school expenses, we recently spoke about, piled to be sure one upon another. The thing is, it’s true, a mere trifle, and the amount only a bagatelle, but it doesn’t seem to be quite proper. But how is it that your

mistress didn’t take this into account?”

P’ing Erh smiled. “There’s a why and a wherefore,” she answered. “All the things required by you, young ladies, must absolutely be subject to a fixed rule; for the different compradores have to lay in a stock of each every month; and to send them to us by the maids to take charge of; but purely and simply to keep in readiness for you to use. No such thing could ever be tolerated as that each of us should have to get money every day and try and hunt up some one to go and buy these articles for us! That’s how it is that the compradores outside receive a lump sum, and that they send us, month by month, by the female servants the supplies allotted for the different rooms. As regards the two taels monthly allowed you, young ladies, they were not originally intended that you should purchase any such articles with, but that you should, if at any time the ladies in charge of the household affairs happened to be away from home or to have no leisure, be saved the trouble of having to go in search of the proper persons, in the event of your suddenly finding yourselves in need of money. This was done simply because it was feared that you would be subjected to inconvenience. But an unprejudiced glance about me now shows me that at least half of our young mistresses in the various quarters invariably purchase these things with ready money of their own; so I can’t help suspecting that, if it isn’t a question of the compradores shirking their duties, it must be that what they buy is all mere rubbish.”

T’an Ch’un and Li Wan laughed. “You must have kept a sharp lookout to have managed to detect these things!” they said. “But as for shirking the purchases, they don’t actually do so. It’s simply that they’re behind time by a good number of days. Yet when one puts on the screw with them, they get some articles from somewhere or other, who knows where? These are however only a sham; for, in reality, they aren’t fit for use. But as they’re now as ever obtained with cash down, a couple of taels could very well be given to the brothers or sons of some of the other people’s nurses to purchase them with. They’ll then be good for something! Were we however to employ any of the public domestics in the establishment, the things will be just as bad as ever. I wonder how they do manage to get such utter rot as they do?”

“The purchases of the compradores may be what they are,” P’ing Erh smiled; “but were anyone else to buy any better articles, the compradores themselves won’t ever forgive them. Besides other things, they’ll aver that they harbour evil designs, and that they wish to deprive them of their post. That’s how it comes

about that the servants would much rather give offence to you all inside, (by getting inferior things), and that they have no desire to hurt the feelings of the managers outside, (by purchasing anything of superior quality). But if you, young ladies, requisition the services of the nurses, these men won't have the arrogance to make any nonsensical remarks."

"This accounts for the unhappy state my heart is in," T'an Ch'un observed. "But as we're called upon to squander money right and left, and as the things purchased are half of them uselessly thrown away, wouldn't it, after all, be better for us to eliminate this monthly allowance to the compradores? This is the first thing. The next I'd like to ask you is this. When they went, during the new year festivities, to Lai Ta's house, you also went with them; and what do think of that small garden as compared with this of ours?"

"It isn't half as big as ours," P'ing Erh laughingly explained. "The trees and plants are likewise fewer by a good deal."

"When I was having a chat with their daughter," T'an Ch'un proceeded, "she said that, besides the flowers they wear, and the bamboo shoots, vegetables, fish and shrimps they eat from this garden of theirs, there's still enough every year for people to take over under contract, and that at the close of each year there's a surplus in full of two hundred taels. Ever since that day is it that I've become alive to the fact that even a broken lotus leaf, and a blade of withered grass are alike worth money."

"This is, in very truth, the way wealthy and well-to-do people talk!" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "But notwithstanding your honourable position, young ladies, you really understand nothing about these concerns. Yet, haven't you, with all your book-lore, seen anything of the passage in the writing of Chu Fu-tzu: 'Throw not they self away?'"

"I've read it, it's true," T'an Ch'un smiled, "but its object is simply to urge people to exert themselves; it's as much empty talk as any random arguments, and how could it be bodily treated as gospel?"

"Chu-tzu's work all as much empty talk as any random arguments?" Pao-ch'ai exclaimed. "Why every sentence in it is founded on fact. You've only had the management of affairs in your hands for a couple of days, and already greed and ambition have so beclouded your mind that you've come to look upon Chu-tzu

as full of fraud and falsehood. But when you by and bye go out into the world and see all those mighty concerns reeking with greed and corruption, you'll even go so far as to treat Confucius himself as a fraud!"

"Haven't you with all your culture read a book like that of Chi-tzu's?" Pan Ch'un laughed. "Chi-tzu said in bygone days 'that when one descends into the arena where gain and emoluments are to be got, and enters the world of planning and plotting, one makes light of the injunctions of Yao and Shun, and disregards the principles inculcated by Confucius and Mencius.'"

"What about the next line?" Pao-ch'ai insinuated with a significant smile.

"I now cut the text short," T'an Ch'un smilingly rejoined, "in order to adapt the sense to what I want to say. Would I recite the following sentence, and heap abuse upon my own self; is it likely I would; eh?"

"There's nothing under the heavens that can't be turned to some use," Pao-ch'ai added. "And since everything can be utilised, everything must be worth money. But can it be that a person gifted with such intelligence as yours can have had no experience in such great matters and legitimate concerns as these?"

"You send for a person," Li Wan laughingly interposed, 'and you don't speak about what's right and proper, but you start an argument on learning."

"Learning is right and proper," Pao-ch'ai answered. "If we made no allusion to learning, we'd all soon enough drift among the rustic herd!"

The trio bandied words for a while, after which they turned their attention again to pertinent affairs.

T'an Ch'un took up once more the thread of the conversation. "This garden of ours," she argued, "is only half as big as theirs, so if you double the income they derive, you will see that we ought to reap a net profit of four hundred taels a year. But were we also now to secure a contract for our surplus products, the money, we'd earn, would, of course, be a mere trifle and not one that a family like ours should hanker after. And were we to depute two special persons (to attend to the garden), the least permission given by them to any one to turn anything to improper uses, would, since there be so many things of intrinsic value, be tantamount to a reckless destruction of the gifts of heaven. So would it not be preferable to select several quiet, steady and experienced old matrons, out

of those stationed in the grounds, and appoint them to put them in order and look after things? Neither will there be any need then to make them pay any rent, or give any taxes in kind. All we can ask them is to supply the household with whatever they can afford during the year. In the first place, the garden will, with special persons to look after the plants and trees, naturally so improve from year to year that there won't be any bustle or confusion, whenever the time draws nigh to utilise the grounds. Secondly, people won't venture to injure or uselessly waste anything. In the third place, the old matrons themselves will, by availing themselves of these small perquisites, not labour in the gardens year after year and day after day all for no good. Fourthly, it will in like manner be possible to effect a saving in the expenditure for gardeners, rockery-layers, sweepers and other necessary servants. And this excess can be utilised for making up other deficiencies. I don't see any reason why this shouldn't be practicable!"

Pao-ch'ai was standing below contemplating the pictures with characters suspended on the walls. Upon hearing these suggestions, she readily nodded her head assentingly and smiled. "Excellent!" she cried. "'Within three years, there will be no more famines and dearths.'"

"What a first-rate plan!" Li Wan chimed in. "This, if actually adopted, will delight the heart of Madame Wang. Pecuniary economies are of themselves a paltry matter; but there will be then in the garden those to sweep the grounds, and those whose special charge will be to look after them. Besides, were the persons selected allowed to turn up an honest cash by selling part of the products, they will be so impelled by a sense of their responsibilities, and prompted by a desire of gain that there won't any longer be any who won't acquit themselves of their duties to the fullest measure."

"It remained for you, miss, to put these suggestions in words," P'ing Erh remarked. "Our mistress may have entertained the idea, but it is by no means certain that she thought it nice on her part to give utterance to it. For as you, young ladies, live at present in the garden, she could not possibly, unable as she is to supply such additional ornaments as will make it more showy, contrariwise depute people to exercise authority in it, and to keep it in order, with a view of effecting a reduction in expenses. Such a proposal could never have dropped from her lips."

Pao-ch'ai advanced up to her with alacrity. Rubbing her face: "Open that mouth of yours wide," she laughed, "and let me see of what stuff your teeth and tongue

are made! Ever since you put your foot out of bed this morning you've jabbered away up to this very moment! And your song has all been in one strain. For neither have you been very complimentary to Miss Tertia, nor have you admitted that your mistress is, as far as wits go, so much below the mark as to be unable to effect suitable provision. Yet whenever Miss Tertia advanced any arguments, you've at once made use of endless words to join issue with her. This is because the plan devised by Miss Tertia was also hit upon by your lady Feng. But there must surely have been a reason why she couldn't carry it into execution. Again, as the young ladies have now their quarters in the garden, she couldn't, with any decency, direct any one to go and rule over it, for the mere sake of saving a few cash. Just consider this. If the garden is actually handed to people to make profit out of it, the parties interested will, of course, not even permit a single spray of flowers to be plucked, and not a single fruit to be taken away. With such as come within the category of senior young ladies, they won't naturally have the audacity to be particular; but they'll daily have endless rows with the junior girls. (Lady Feng) has, with her fears about the future and her misgivings about the present, shown herself neither too overbearing nor too servile. This mistress of theirs is not friendly disposed towards us, but when she hears of her various proposals, shame might induce her to turn over a new leaf."

"Early this morning," T'an Ch'un laughingly observed, "I was very cross, but as soon as I heard of her (P'ing Erh's) arrival, I casually remembered that her mistress employed, during her time, such domestics as were up to all kinds of larks, and at the sight of her, I got more cross than ever. But, little though one would have thought it, she behaved from the moment she came, like a rat that tries to get out of the way of a cat. And as she had had to stand for ever so long, I pitied her very much; but she took up the thread of the conversation, and went on to spin that long yarn of hers. Yet, instead of mentioning that her mistress treats me with every consideration, she, on the contrary, observed: 'The kindness with which you have all along dealt with our lady miss, has not been to no purpose.' This remark therefore not only dispelled my anger, but filled me with so much shame that I began to feel sore at heart. And, when I came to think carefully over the matter, I failed to see how I, a mere girl, who had personally done so much mischief that not a soul cared a straw for me and not a soul took any interest in me, could possess any such good qualities as to treat any one kindly…."

When she reached this point, she could not check her tears from brimming over. Li Wan and her associates perceived how pathetically she spoke; and, recalling to mind bow Mrs. Chao had always run her down, and how she had ever been

involved in some mess or other with Madame Wang, on account of this Mrs. Chao, they too found it difficult to refrain from melting into sobs. But they then used their joint efforts to console her.

“Let’s avail ourselves of this quiet day,” they suggested, “to try and find out how we could increase our revenue and remove abuses, so as not to render futile the charge laid on us by Madame Wang. What use or purpose is it to allude to such trivial matters?”

“I’ve already grasped your object,” P’ing Erh hastily ventured. “Miss, speak out; who do you consider fit? And as soon as the proper persons have been fixed upon, everything will be square enough.”

“What you say is all very well,” T’an Ch’un rejoined, “but it will be necessary to let your lady know something about it. It has never been the proper thing for us in here to scrape together any small profits. But as your mistress is full of gumption, I adopted the course I did. Had she been at all narrowminded, with many prejudices and many jealousies, I wouldn’t have shown the least willingness in the matter. But, as it will look as if I were bent upon pulling her to pieces, how can I take action without consulting her?”

“In that case,” P’ing Erh smiled, “I’ll go and tell her something about it.”

With this response, she went on the errand; and only returned after a long lapse of time. “I said,” she laughed, “that it would be perfectly useless for me to go. How ever could our lady not readily accede to an excellent proposal like this?”

Hearing this, T’an Ch’un forthwith joined Li Wan in directing a servant to ask for the roll, containing the names of the matrons in the garden, and bring it to them. When produced, they all held council together, and fixing cursorily upon several persons, they summoned them to appear before them. Li Wan then explained to them the general outline of their duties; and not one was there among the whole company, who listened to her, who would not undertake the charge. One said: “If you confide that bamboo tree for twelve months to my care, it will again next year be a single tree, but besides the shoots, which will have been eaten at home, I shall be able, in the course of the year, to also pay in some money.” “Hand me over,” another one remarked, “that portion of paddy field, and there will, during the year, be no need to touch any public funds on account of the various birds, large and small, which are kept for mere fun.

Besides that, I shall be in a position to give in something more."

T'an Ch'un was about to pass a remark when a servant reported that the doctor had come; and that he had entered the garden to see Miss Shih. So the matrons were obliged to go and usher the doctor in.

"Were there a hundred of you here," promptly expostulated P'ing Erh, "you wouldn't know what propriety means! Are there perchance no couple of housekeepers about to push themselves forward and see the doctor in?"

"There's dame Wu and dame T'an," the servant, who brought the message, replied. "The two are on duty at the southwest corner at the 'accumulated splendour' gate."

At this answer, P'ing Erh allowed the subject to drop.

After the departure of the matrons, T'an Ch'un inquired of Pao-ch'ai what she thought of them.

"Such as are diligent at the outset," Pao-ch'ai answered smiling, "become remiss in the end; and those who have a glib tongue have an eye to gain."

T'an Ch'un listened to her reply; and nodding her head, she extolled its wisdom. Then showing them with her finger several names on the list, she submitted them for the perusal of the trio. P'ing Erh speedily went and fetched a pen and inkslab.

"This old mother Chu," the trio observed, "is a trustworthy woman. What's more, this old dame and her sons have generation after generation done the sweeping of the bamboo groves. So let's now place the various bamboo trees under her control. This old mother T'ien was originally a farmer, and everything in the way of vegetables and rice, in and about the Tao Hsiang village, should, albeit they couldn't, planted as they are as a mere pastime, be treated in such earnest as to call for large works and extensive plantations, be entrusted to her care; for won't they fare better if she can be on the spot and tend them with extra diligence at the proper times and seasons?"

"What a pity it is," T'an Ch'un proceeded smilingly, "that two places so spacious as the Heng Wu garden and the I Hung court bring no grit to the mill."

"Things in the Heng Wu garden are in a worse state," Li Wan hastily interposed.

“Aren’t the scented wares and scented herbs sold at present everywhere in perfumery shops, large fairs and great temples the very counterpart of these things here? So if you reckon up, you will find how much greater a return these articles will give than any other kind of product. As for the I Hung court, we needn’t mention other things, but only take into account the roses that bud during the two seasons of spring and summer; to how many don’t they amount in all? Besides these, we’ve got along the whole hedge, cinnamon roses and monthly roses, stock roses, honey-suckle and westeria. Were these various flowers dried and sold to the tea and medicine shops, they’d also fetch a good deal of money.”

“Quite so!” T’an Ch’un acquiesced with a smile. “The thing is that there’s no one with any notion how to deal with scented herbs.”

“There’s Ying Erh who waits on Miss Pao-ch’ai,” P’ing Erh promptly smiled. “Her mother is well-versed in these things. It was only the other day that she plucked a few, and plaited them, after drying them well in the sun, into a flower-basket and a gourd, and gave them to me to play with. But miss can you have forgotten all about it?”

“I was this very minute speaking in your praise,” Pao-ch’ai observed smiling, “and do you come to chaff me?”

“What makes you say so?” exclaimed the trio, in utter astonishment.

“It will on no account do,” Pao-ch’ai added. “You employ such a lot of people in here that they all lead a lazy life and have nothing to put a hand to, and were I also now to introduce some more, that tribe will look even upon me with utter contempt. But let me think of some one for you. There’s in the I Hung court, an old dame Yeh; she’s Pei Ming’s mother. That woman is an honest old lady; and is furthermore on the best of terms with our Ying Erh’s mother. So wouldn’t it be well were this charge given to this dame Yeh? Should there even be anything that she doesn’t know, there’ll be no necessity for us to tell her. She can go straightway and consult with Ying Erh’s mother. And if she can’t attend to everything herself, it won’t matter to whom she relegates some of her duties. These will be purely private favours. In the event too of any one making any mean insinuations, the blame won’t fall on our shoulders. By adopting this course, you’ll be managing things in such a way as to do extreme justice to all; and the trust itself will also be placed on a most satisfactory footing.”

“Excellent!” ejaculated Li Wan and P’ing Erh simultaneously.

“This may be well and good,” T’an Ch’un laughed, “but the fear is that at the sight of gain, they’ll forget all about propriety.”

“That’s nothing to do with us!” P’ing Erh rejoined a smile playing, about her lips. “It was only the other day that Ying Erh recognised dame Yeh as her adopted mother, and invited her to eat and drink with them, so that the two families are on the most intimate terms.”

At this assurance, T’an Ch’un relinquished the topic of conversation, and, holding council together, they selected several persons, all of whom the four had ever viewed with impartial favour and they marked off their names, by dotting them with a pen.

In a little while, the matrons came to report that ‘the doctor had gone;’ and they handed the prescription. Their three mistresses then perused its contents. On the one hand, they despatched domestics to take it outside, so that the drugs should be got, and to superintend their decoction. On the other, T’an Ch’un and Li Wan explicitly explained to the various servants chosen what particular place each had to look after. “Exclusive,” they added, “of what fixed custom requires for home consumption during the four seasons, you are still at liberty to pluck whatever remains and have it taken away. As for the profits, we’ll settle accounts at the close of the year.”

“I’ve also bethought myself of something,” T’an Ch’un smiled. “If the settlement of accounts takes place at the end of the year, the money will, at the time of delivery, be naturally paid into the accountancy. Those high up will then as usual add a whole lot of controllers; and these will, on their part, fleece their own share as soon as the money gets into the palms of their hand. But as by this system, we’ve now initiated, you’ve been singled out for appointment, you’ve already ridden so far above their heads, that they foster all sorts of animosity against you. They don’t, however, give vent to their feelings; but if they don’t seize the close of the year, when you have to deliver your accounts, to play their tricks on you, for what other chances will they wait? Moreover, they obtain, in everything that comes under their control during the year, half of every share their masters get. This is an old custom. Every one is aware of its existence. But this is a new regime I now introduce in this garden, so don’t let the money find its way into their hands! Whenever the annual settling of accounts arrives, bring

them in to us."

"My idea is," Pao-ch'ai smilingly suggested, "that no accounts need be handed even inside. This one will have a surplus, that one a deficit, so that it will involve no end of trouble; wouldn't it be better therefore if we were to find out who of them would take over this or that particular kind and let them purvey the various things? These are for the exclusive use of the inmates of the garden; and I've already made an estimate of them for you. They amount to just a few sorts, and simply consist of head-oil, rouge, powder and scented paper; in all of which, the young ladies and maids are subject to a fixed rule. Then, besides these, there are the brooms, dust-baskets and poles, wanted in different localities, and the food for the large and small animals and birds, and the deer and rabbits. These are the only kinds of things required. And if they contract for them, there'll be little need for any one to go to the accountancy for money. But just calculate what a saving will thus be effected!"

"All these items are, I admit, mere trifles," P'ing Erh smiled, "but if you lump together what's used during a year, you will find that a saving of four hundred taels will be effected."

"Again!" smilingly remarked Pao-ch'ai, "it would be four hundred taels in one year; but eight hundred taels in two years; and with these, we could purchase a few more houses and let them; and in the way of poor, sandy land we could also add several acres to those we've already got. 'There will, of course, still remain a surplus; but as they will have ample trouble and inconvenience to put up with during the year, they should also be allowed some balance in hand so as to make up what's wanted for themselves. The main object is, of course, to increase profits and curtail expenses, yet we couldn't be stingy to any excessive degree. In fact, were we even able to make any further economy of over two or three hundred taels, it would never be the proper thing; should this involve a breach of the main principles of decorum. With this course duly put into practice, outside, the accountancy will issue in one year four or five hundred taels less, without even the semblance of any parsimony; while, inside, the matrons will obtain, on the other hand, some little thing to supply their wants with; the nurses, who have no means of subsistence, will likewise be placed in easy circumstances; and the plants and trees in the garden will year by year increase in strength and grow more abundantly. In this wise, you too will have such articles as will be fit for use. So that this plan will, to some extent, not constitute a breach of the high principles of propriety. And if ever we want to retrench a little more from where

won’t we be able to get money? But if the whole balance, if any, be put to the credit of the public fund, every one, inside as well as outside, will fill the streets with the din of murmurings! And won’t this be then a slur upon the code of honour of a household such as yours? So were any charge to be entrusted to this one, out of the several tens of old nurses at present employed in the garden, and not to that one, the remainder will naturally resent such injustice. As I said a while back all that these women will have to provide among themselves amounts to a few articles, so they will unavoidably have ample means. Hence each should be told to contribute, beyond the articles that fall to her share during the year, a certain number of tiaos, whether she may or may not realise any balance, and then jointly lump these sums together, and distribute them among those nurses only on service in the garden. For although they may not have anything to do with the control of these things, they themselves will have to stay in the grounds, to keep an eye over the servants on duty, to shut the doors, to close the windows and to get up early and retire late. Whenever it rains in torrents or it snows hard and chairs have to be carried, for you, young ladies, to go out and come in; or boats have to be punted, and sledges drawn, these rough and arduous duties come alike within their sphere of work. They have to labour in the garden from one year’s end to the other, and though, they earn something in those grounds, it’s only right that they should able to get some small benefits in the discharge of their legitimate duties. But there’s another most trivial point that I would broach with less reserve. If you only think of your ease, and don’t share the profits with them, they will, of course, never presume to show their displeasure, but in their hearts they won’t cherish you any good feeling. What they’ll do will be to make public business a pretext to serve their own private ends with; they’ll pluck more of your fruits than they should; and cut greater quantities of your flowers than they ought. And you people will have a grievance, but you won’t have anywhere to go and confide it. But should they too reap some gain, they’ll readily look after such things on your behalf as you won’t have the time to attend to.”

The matrons listened to her explanations; (and finding that) they would be removed from the control of the accountancy, that they would not be compelled to go and settle accounts with lady Feng, and that all that they would be called upon to do every year would be to supply a few more tiaos, were each and all delighted to an exceptional degree. So much so, that every one of them exclaimed in a chorus that they were quite prepared to agree to the terms. “It is better,” they said, “than to be obliged to go out and be squeezed by them; and to have to fork out our own money as well.”

Those too not entrusted with the care of any portion of land were also highly elated, when they heard that at the close of each year they would, though they had no valid claim, come in for some share of hard cash.

“They’ll have to bear the trouble,” they however argued, “to keep things in order, so it’s only right that they should be left with a few cash to meet their various wants with; and how could we very well gobble our three meals without doing a stroke of work?”

“Worthy dames,” Pao-ch’ai smiled, “you mustn’t decline. These duties are within your province and you should fulfil them. All you need do is to exert yourselves a bit by day and night, and not be so remiss and careless as to suffer any of the servants to drink and gamble; that’s all. Otherwise, I myself must have nothing to do with the control. But you, yourselves, know well enough that it’s my aunt who appealed to me with her own lips three and five times to do it as a favour to her. ‘Your eldest sister-in-law,’ she represented, ‘has at present no leisure, and the other girls are young,’ and then she asked me to look after things. So if I now don’t accede, it’s as clear as day that I shall be the cause of much worry to my aunt. Our lady Feng herself is seriously ill, and our domestic affairs can’t hang fire. I’m really with nothing to do, so were even a mere neighbour to solicit my help, I would also feel bound to lend her a hand in her pressure of work. How much more therefore when it’s my own aunt, who invokes my aid? Setting aside the way I’m execrated by one and all, how would I ever be able to stare my aunt in the face, if, while I gave my sole mind to winning fame and fishing for praise, any one got so intoxicated and lost so much in gambling as to stir up trouble? At such a juncture remorse on your part will be too late! Even the old reputation you have ever enjoyed will entirely be lost and gone. Those young ladies and girls and this vast garden are alike placed under your supervision, purely and simply because one takes into account that you have been nurses to three or four generations and that you have most scrupulously observed the rules of etiquette and propriety. It’s but fair that you should try, with one mind, and show some little regard for what’s right and proper. But if you contrariwise behave with such laxity as to let people gratify their wishes by guzzling and gambling, and my aunt comes to hear of these nice doings, a little scolding from her will be of little consequence. But if the various women, who attend to the household, get scent of the state of affairs, they will haul you over the coals, without even so much as breathing one single word beforehand to my aunt. And venerable people, though you are, you will then, instead of tendering advice to young people, be called to account by them. As housekeepers, they

exercise, it's true, authority over you; but why shouldn't you yourselves observe a certain amount of decorum? And if you do so, will they have any occasion to bully you? The reason why I've now bethought myself of this special boon for you is that you should unanimously strain every nerve to diligently attend to the garden, in order that the powers that be may, at the sight of your unrelenting care and zeal, have no cause to give way to solicitude. And won't they inwardly look up to you with regard? Neither will you render of no effect the various benefits devised for them. But go now and minutely ponder over all my advice!"

All the women received her words with gratification. "What you say is quite right," they replied. "From this time forth you, miss, and you, our lady, can well compose your minds. With the interest both of you feel on our behalf, may heaven and earth not spare us, if we do not display a full amount of gratitude for all your kindnesses."

These assurances were still being uttered when they saw Lin Chih-hsiao's wife walk in. "The family of the Chen mansion of Chiang Nan," she explained, "arrived in the capital yesterday. To-day, they're going into the palace to offer their congratulations. But they've now sent messengers ahead to come and bring presents and pay their respects."

While she spoke, she produced the list of presents and handed it up. T'an Ch'un took it over from her. "They consist," she said, perusing it, "of twelve rolls of brocades and satins embroidered with dragons, such as are for imperial use; twelve rolls of satins of various colours, of the kind worn by the Emperor; twelve rolls of every sort of imperial gauze; twelve rolls of palace silks of the quality used by his majesty; and twenty rolls of satins, gauzes, silks and thin silks of different colours, generally worn by officials."

After glancing over the list, Li Wan and T'an Ch'un suggested that a first-class tip should be given to the messengers who brought them, after which, they went on to direct a servant to convey the tidings to dowager lady Chia.

Old lady Chia gave orders to call Li Wan, T'an Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls. On their arrival, the presents were passed under review; and this over, Li Wan put them aside. "You must wait," she said to the servants of the inner store-room, "until Madame Wang comes back and sees them; you can then lock them up."

“This Chen family too,” old lady Chia thereupon added, “isn’t like any other family; the highest tips should therefore be conferred upon the men. But as in a twinkle, they may also send some of their womankind to come and make their obeisance, silks should be got ready in anticipation.”

Scarcely was this remark concluded before a domestic actually announced: ‘that four ladies of the Chen mansion had come to pay their respects.’

Upon hearing this, dowager lady Chia hastily directed that they should be introduced into her presence. The four women ranged from forty years and over. Their clothing and head-gear were not, in any material degree, different from those of mistresses. As soon as they presented their compliments and inquired about their healths, old lady Chia desired that four footstools should be moved forward. But though the four women thanked her for bidding them sit down, they only occupied the stools, after Pao-ch’ai had seated herself.

“When did you enter the capital?” old lady Chia inquired.

The four women jumped to their feet with alacrity. “We entered the capital yesterday,” they answered. “Our lady has taken our young lady today into the palace to pay their homage. That’s why she bade us come and give you their compliments, and see how the young ladies are getting on.”

“You hadn’t paid a visit to the capital for ever so many years,” dowager lady Chia smilingly observed, “and here you appear now quite unexpectedly!”

The four women simultaneously smiled again. “Quite so!” they said. “We received this year imperial orders, summoning us to the capital!”

“Has the whole family come?” old lady Chia asked.

“Our old mistress, our young master, the two young ladies and the other ladies haven’t come up,” the four women explained. “Only our lady has come, together with Miss Tertia.”

“Is she engaged to any one?” old lady Chia asked.

“Not yet,” rejoined the quartet.

“The two families, that of your senior married lady and that of your lady

Secunda are both on most intimate terms with ours," dowager lady Chia smilingly added.

"Yes, they are," replied the four women with a smile. "The letters received each year from our young ladies, assure us that they're entirely dependent upon the kindness bestowed upon them, in your worthy mansion, for their well-being."

"What kindness?" old lady Chia exclaimed laughingly. "These two families are really friends of long standing. In addition to this, they're old relatives. So what we do is our simple bounden duty. What's more in the favour of your two young ladies is, that they're not full of their own importance. That's how it is that we've come to be on such close terms."

The four women smiled. "This is mainly due to your venerable ladyship's excessive humility," they answered.

"Is that young gentleman of yours too with your old mistress?" old lady Chia went on to inquire.

"Yes, he has also come with our old mistress," the four women retorted.

"How old is he?" old lady Chia then asked. "Does he go to school?" she afterwards inquired.

"He's thirteen this year," the four women said by way of response. "But all through those good looks of his, our old mistress cherishes him so fondly that from his youth up, he has been wayward to the extreme, and that he now daily plays the truant. But our master and mistress as well don't keep any great check over him."

"Yet, he can't resemble that young fellow of ours," old lady Chia laughed. "What's the name of your young gentleman?"

"As our old mistress treats him just like a real precious gem," the quartet explained, "and as his complexion is naturally so white, her ladyship calls him Pao-yü."

"Here's another one with the name of Pao-yü!" old lady Chia laughingly said to Li Wan.

Li Wan and her companions hastily made a curtsey. “There have been, from old times to the present,” they smiled, “very many among contemporaries and persons of different generations as well, who have borne duplicate names.”

The four women also smiled. “After the selection of this infant name,” they proceeded, “we all, both high or low, began to give way to surmises, as we could not make out in what relative’s or friend’s family there was a lad also called by the same name. But as we hadn’t come to the capital for ten years or so, we couldn’t remember.”

“That young fellow is my grandson,” dowager lady Chia remarked. “Hallo! some one come here!”

The married women and maids assented and approached several steps.

“Go into the garden,” old lady Chia smilingly said, “and call our Pao-yü here, so that these four housekeeping dames should see how he compares with their own Pao-yü.”

The married women, upon hearing her orders, promptly went off. After a while, they entered the room pressing round Pao-yü. The moment the four dames caught sight of him, they speedily rose to their feet. “He has given us such a start!” they exclaimed smilingly. “Had we not come into your worthy mansion, and perchance, met him, elsewhere, we would have taken him for our own Pao-yü, and followed him as far as the capital.”

While speaking they came forward and took hold of his hands and assailed him with questions.

Pao-yü however also put on a smile and inquired after their healths.

“How do his looks compare with those of your young gentleman?” dowager lady Chia asked as she smiled.

“The way the four dames ejaculated just now,” Li Wan and her companions explained, “was sufficient to show how much they resemble in looks.”

“How could there ever he such a coincidence?” old lady Chia laughed. “Yet, the children of wealthy families are so delicately nurtured that unless their faces are so deformed as to make them downright ugly, they’re all equally handsome, as

far as general appearances go. So there's nothing strange in this!"

"As we gaze at his features," the quartet added, with smiling faces, "we find him the very image of him; and from what we gather from your venerable ladyship, he's also like him in waywardness. But, as far as we can judge, this young gentleman's disposition is ever so much better than that of ours."

"What makes you think so?" old lady Chia precipitately inquired.

"We saw it as soon as we took hold of the young gentleman's hands," the four women laughingly rejoined, "and when he spoke to us. Had it been that fellow of ours, he would have simply called us fools. Not to speak of taking his hand in ours, why we daren't even slightly move any of his things. That's why, those who wait on him are invariably young girls."

Before the four dames had time to conclude what they had to say, Li Wan and the rest found it so hard to check themselves that with one voice they burst into loud laughter.

Old lady Chia also laughed. "Let's also send some one now," she said, "to have a look at your Pao-yü. When his hand is taken, he too is sure to make an effort to put up with it. But don't you know that children of families such as yours and mine are bound, notwithstanding their numerous perverse and strange defects, to return the orthodox civilities, when they come across any strangers. But should they not return the proper civilities, they should, by no manner of means, be suffered to behave with such perverseness. It's the way that grown-up people doat on them that makes them what they are. And as they can, first and foremost, boast of bewitching good looks and they comport themselves, secondly, towards visitors with all propriety—, in fact, with less faulty deportment than their very seniors—, they manage to win the love and admiration of such as only get a glimpse of them. Hence it is that they're secretly indulged to a certain degree. But if they don't show the least regard to any one inside or outside, and so reflect no credit upon their parents, they deserve, with all their handsome looks, to be flogged to death."

These sentiments evoked a smile from the four dames. "Your words venerable lady," they exclaimed, "are quite correct. But though our Pao-yü be wilful and strange in his ways, yet, whenever he meets any visitors, he behaves with courteousness and good manners; so much so, that he's more pleasing to watch

than even grown-up persons. There is no one, therefore, who sees him without falling in love with him. But you'll say: 'why is he then beaten?' You really aren't aware that at home he has no regard either for precept or for heaven; that he comes out with things that never suggest themselves to the imagination of grown-up people, and that he does everything that takes one by surprise. The result is that his father and mother are driven to their wits' ends. But wilfulness is natural to young children. Reckless expenditure is a common characteristic of young men. Antipathy to school is a common feeling with young people. Yet there are ways and means to bring him round. The worse with him is that his disposition is so crotchety and whimsical. Can this ever do?…."

This reply was barely ended when a servant informed them that their mistress had returned. Madame Wang entered the room, and saluted the women. The four dames paid their obeisance to her. But they had just had sufficient time to pass a few general observations, when dowager lady Chia bade them go and rest. Madame Wang then handed the tea in person and withdrew from the apartment. But when the four dames got up to say goodbye, old lady Chia adjourned to Madame Wang's quarters. After a chat with her on domestic affairs, she however told the women to go back; so let us put them by without any further allusion to them.

During this while, old lady Chia's spirits waxed so high, that she told every one and any one she came across that there was another Pao-yü, and that he was, in every respect, the very image of her grandson.

But as each and all bore in mind that there were many inmates among the large households of those officials with official ancestors, called by the same names, that it was an ordinary occurrence for a grandmother to be passionately fond of her grandson, and that there was nothing out-of-the-way about it, they treated the matter as of no significance. Pao-yü alone however was such a hair-brained simpleton that he conjectured that the statements made by the four dames had been intended to flatter his grandmother Chia.

But subsequently he betook himself into the garden to see how Shih Hsiang-yün was getting on.

"Compose your mind now," Shih Hsiang-yün then said to him, "and go on with your larks! Once, you were as lonely as a single fibre, which can't be woven into thread, and like a single bamboo, which can't form a grove, but now you've

found your pair. When you exasperate your parents, and they give you beans, you'll be able to bolt to Nanking in quest of the other Pao-yü."

"What utter rubbish!" Pao-yü exclaimed. "Do you too believe that there's another Pao-yü?"

"How is it," Hsiang-yün asked, "that there was some one in the Lieh state called Lin Hsiang-ju, and that during the Han dynasty there lived again another person, whose name was Ssu Ma Hsiang-ju?"

"This matter of names is all well enough," Pao-yü rejoined with a smile. "But as it happens, his very appearance is the counterpart of mine. Such a thing could never be!"

"How is it," Hsiang-yün inquired, "that when the K'uang people saw Confucius, they fancied it was Yang Huo?"

"Confucius and Yang Huo," Pao-yü smilingly argued, "may have been alike in looks, but they hadn't the same names. Lin and Ssu were again, notwithstanding their identical names, nothing like each other in appearances. But can it ever be possible that he and I should resemble each other in both respects?"

Hsiang-yün was at a loss what reply to make to his arguments. "You may," she consequently remarked smiling, "propound any rubbish you like, I'm not in the humour to enter into any discussion with you. Whether there be one or not is quite immaterial to me. It doesn't concern me at all."

Saying this, she lay herself down.

Pao-yü however began again to exercise his mind with further surmises. "If I say," he cogitated, "that there can't be one, there seems from all appearances to be one. And if I say that there is one, I haven't, on the other hand, seen him with my own eyes."

Sad and dejected he returned therefore to his quarters, and reclining on his couch, he silently communed with his own thoughts until he unconsciously became drowsy and fell fast asleep.

Finding himself (in his dream) in some garden or other, Pao-yü was seized with astonishment. "Besides our own garden of Broad Vista," he reflected, "is there

another such garden?" But while indulging in these speculations, several girls, all of whom were waiting-maids, suddenly made their appearance from the opposite direction. Pao-yü was again filled with surprise. "Besides Yüan Yang, Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh," he pondered, "are there verily such maidens as these?"

"Pao-yü!" he heard that company of maids observe, with faces beaming with smiles, "how is it you find yourself in here?"

Pao-yü laboured under the impression that they were addressing him. With hasty step, he consequently drew near them, and returned their smiles. "I got here," he answered, "quite listlessly. What old family friend's garden is this, I wonder? But sisters, pray, take me for a stroll."

The maids smiled with one consent. "Really!" they exclaimed, "this isn't our Pao-yü. But his looks too are spruce and nice; and he is as precocious too with his tongue."

Pao-yü caught their remarks. "Sisters!" he eagerly cried, "is there actually a second Pao-yü in here?"

"As for the two characters 'Pao-yü,'" the maids speedily explained, "every one in our house has received our old mistress' and our mistress' injunctions to use them as a spell to protract his life for many years and remove misfortune from his path, and when we call him by that name, he simply goes into ecstasies, at the very mention of it. But you, young brat, from what distant parts of the world do you hail that you've recklessly been also dubbed by the same name? But beware lest we pound that frowzy flesh of yours into mincemeat."

"Let's be off at once!" urged another maid, as she smiled. "Don't let our Pao-yü see us here and say again that by hobnobbing with this stinking young fellow, we've been contaminated by all his pollution."

With these words on her lips, they straightway walked off.

Pao-yü fell into a brown study. "There's never been," he mused, "any one to treat me with such disdain before! But what is it, in fact, that induces them to behave towards me in this manner? May it not be true that there lives another human being the very image of myself?"

While lost in reverie, he advanced with heedless step, until he reached a

courtyard. Pao-yü was struck with wonder. “Is there actually,” he cried, “besides the I Hung court another court like it?” Spontaneously then ascending the steps, he entered an apartment, in which he discerned some one reclining on a couch. On the off side sat several girls, busy at needlework; now laughing joyfully; now practising their jokes; when he overheard the young person on the couch heave a sigh.

“Pao-yü,” smilingly inquired a maid, “what, aren’t you asleep? What are you once more sighing for? I presume it’s because your sister is ill that you abandon yourself again to idle fears and immoderate anguish!”

These words fell on Pao-yü‘s ears, and took him quite aback.

“I’ve heard grandmother say,” he overheard the young person on the couch observe, “that there lives at Ch’ang An, the capital, another Pao-yü endowed with the same disposition as myself. I never believed what she told me; but I just had a dream, and in this dream I found myself in a garden of the metropolis where I came across several maidens; all of whom called me a ‘stinking young brat,’ and would have nothing whatever to do with me. But after much difficulty, I succeeded in penetrating into his room. He happened to be fast asleep. There he lay like a mere bag of bones. His real faculties had flown somewhere or other; whither it was hard for me to say.”

Hearing this, “I’ve come here,” Pao-yü said with alacrity, “in search of Pao-yü; and are you, indeed, that Pao-yü?”

The young man on the couch jumped down with all haste and enfolded him in his arms. “Are you verily Pao-yü?” he laughingly asked. “This isn’t by any means such stuff as dreams are made of!”

“How can you call this a dream?” Pao-yü rejoined. “It’s reality, yea, nothing but reality!”

But scarcely was this rejoinder over, than he heard some one come, and say: “our master, your father, wishes to see you, Pao-yü.”

The two lads started with fear. One Pao-yü rushed off with all despatch. The other promptly began to shout, “Pao-yü! come back at once! Pao-yü; be quick and return!”

Hsi Jen, who stood by (Pao-yü), heard him call out his own name, in his dreams, and immediately gave him a push and woke him up. “Where is Pao-yü gone to?” she laughed.

Although Pao-yü was by this time aroused from sleep, his senses were as yet dull, so pointing towards the door, “He’s just gone out,” he replied, “he’s not far off.”

Hsi Jen laughed. “You’re under the delusion of a dream,” she said. “Rub your eyes and look carefully! It’s your reflection in the mirror.”

Pao-yü cast a glance in front of him, and actually caught sight of the large inlaid mirror, facing him quite opposite, so he himself burst out laughing. But, presently, a maid handed him a rince-bouche and tea and salt, and he washed his mouth.

“Little wonder is it,” She Yüeh ventured, “if our old mistress has repeatedly enjoined that it isn’t good to have too many mirrors about in young people’s rooms, for as the spirit of young persons is not fully developed there is every fear, with mirrors casting their reflections all over the place, of their having wild dreams in their sleep. And is a bed now placed before that huge mirror there? When the covers of the mirrors are let down, no harm can befall; but as the season advances, and the weather gets hot, one feels so languid and tired, that is one likely to think of dropping them? Just as it happened a little time back; it slipped entirely from your memory. Of course, when he first got into bed, he must have played with his face towards the glass; but upon shortly closing his eyes, he must naturally have fallen into such confused dreams, that they thoroughly upset his rest. Otherwise, how is it possible that he should have started shouting his own name? Would it not be as well if the bed were moved inside tomorrow? That’s the proper place for it.”

Hardly had she, however, done, before they perceived a servant, sent by Madame Wang to call Pao-yü. But what she wanted to tell him is not yet known, so, reader, listen to the circumstances recorded in the subsequent chapter.

END OF BOOK II.

[transcriber’s note: The second volume of this translation ends thus, and no more of it was ever published.]

ERRATA

[original book lists no errata; these were found during Project Gutenberg proofreading. The format is imitated from the list actually appearing at the end of volume I. If a word is split across a line or page then the line or page given is that on which the erroneous part of the word appears.

On several occasions the book uses nested double quotes. One person, speaking, quotes another person, speaking. “This example,” the proofreader said, “is of when my friend told me, “Don’t take any wooden nickels.” So I have always been careful.” When these were found, the inner quotes were changed to single quotes for increased clarity. Such changes are not noted in the errata. A few other corrections to punctuation are noted below, but most are not.

The following are not misspellings: “dumfoundered” “parricide” “nobble” “finicking”. “shewing” was very moldy at the time this was written but still not deceased. The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, was used as the authority for spellings. I don’t know about “per mensem” Chapter XXXVI page 180, line 18. I don’t know about “titify” Chapter XL page 258, line 21.]

Chap. XXV Page 8 Line 29: doesn’t *not* does’nt XXVII ” 37 ” 10: peccadilloes *not* peccadiloes XXVIII ” 64 ” 6: on *not* ou XXVIII ” 67 ” 19: enumeration *not* enuneration XXX ” 95 ” 29: them,” *not* them.” XXX ” 100 ” 24: mustn’t *not* musn’t XXXI ” 109 ” 32: needn’t *not* need’nt XXXII ” 119 ” 40: eh!” *not* eh! XXXII ” 120 ” 30: “Who *not* Who XXXII ” 128 ” 13: stitch *not* stich XXXIII ” 137 ” 2: fidgetted *not* figetted XXXIV ” 147 ” 28: promptly *not* promply XXXIV ” 155 ” 32: questions?” *not* questions? XXXIV ” 157 ” 7: contrariwise *not* contrarivise XXXV ” 163 ” 4: eat,” *not* eat” XXXV ” 163 ” 13: successive *not* succcessive XXXV ” 163 ” 35: forty *not* fourty XXXV ” 171 ” 12: birthday *not* brithday XXXVI ” 180 ” 2: tael. *not* tael.” XXXVI ” 190 ” 20: birthday *not* brithday XXXVII ” 194 ” 18: comes *not* come’s XXXVII ” 198 ” 10: Tomorrow *not* To-morow XXXVII ” 199 ” 32: “Well,” *not* “Well”, XXXVII ” 199 ” 33: done.” *not* done? XXXVII ” 199 ” 40: fairest *not* fairiest XXXVII ” 206 ” 13: mustn’t *not* musn’t XXXVII ” 207 ” 36: get *not* ged XXXVII ” 211 ” 16: do?” *not* do? XXXVIII ” 219 ” 6: stomachaches.” *not* stomachaches. XXXVIII ” 228 ” 13: while *not* whily XXXIX ” 232 ” 5: with?” *not* with?,’

XXXIX ” 237 ” 9: conscious *not* concious XXXIX ” 242 ” 1: temple.” *not* temple. XL ” 245 ” 38: little *not* litte XL ” 248 ” 11: silk.” *not* silk?” XL ” 254 ” 12: They’re *not* The’re XL ” 255 ” 8: autograph *not* authograph XL ” 257 ” 16: mustn’t *not* musn’t XL ” 258 ” 13: fogies *not* foggies XL ” 258 ” 20: predilection *not* predeliction XL ” 258 ” 35: curtains.” *not* curtains. XL ” 258 ” 39: enough.” *not* enough. XL ” 263 ” 8: peony *not* peone XLI ” 278 ” 11: haven’t *not* have’nt XLII ” 282 ” 4: haven’t *not* have’nt XLII ” 282 ” 19: haven’t *not* have’nt XLII ” 283 ” 14: ensconce *not* ensconse XLII ” 284 ” 26: medicine *not* medecine XLII ” 284 ” 39: medicines *not* medecines XLII ” 285 ” 27: medicines *not* medecines XLII ” 288 ” 5: aren’t *not* are’nt XLII ” 290 ” 27: locust *not* lucust XLII ” 290 ” 27: feed.’” *not* feed.’ XLIII ” 309 ” 31: grandiloquent *not* grandeloquent XLIV ” 314 ” 12: shouldn’t *not* should’nt XLIV ” 316 ” 4: mustn’t *not* must’nt XLIV ” 317 ” 6: employed the *not* employed on the XLIV ” 322 ” 3: differed *not* differred XLIV ” 322 ” 31: swelled *not* swole XLIV ” 323 ” 15: unhappiness *not* uuhappiness XLV ” 337 ” 30: ginseng *not* ginsing XLV ” 338 ” 22: medicines *not* medecines XLV ” 343 ” 30: uselessly *not* uselesly XLVI ” 352 ” 26: mightn’t *not* mighn’t XLVII ” 372 ” 32: friendship *not* frienship XLVII ” 378 ” 3: proffered *not* proferred XLVIII ” 380 ” 21: worldly *not* wordly XLVIII ” 386 ” 4: antithetical *not* antetithical XLVIII ” 386 ” 23: Ling *not* Ling, XLVIII ” 386 ” 23: smile *not* smiled XLVIII ” 386 ” 35: stanzas *not* stanaas XLVIII ” 389 ” 24: cockatoo *not* cuckatoo XLVIII ” 391 ” 27: ‘Tis *not* T’is XLVIII ” 391 ” 31: ‘Tis *not* T’is XLIX ” 393 ” 34: would’st *not* woulds’t XLIX ” 393 ” 37: ‘tis *not* t’is XLIX ” 401 ” 1: simultaneously *not* simultaneouly L ” 411 ” 25: ‘tis *not* t’is L ” 413 ” 17: ‘tis *not* t’is L ” 415 ” 35: But by and bye *not* But and bye L ” 417 ” 17: ‘tis *not* t’is L ” 417 ” 17: ‘tis *not* ‘t’is [yes twice in the same line] L ” 417 ” 25: ‘tis *not* t’is L ” 418 ” 10: haven’t *not* have’nt L ” 423 ” 38: blossom *not* blosson LI ” 437 ” 37: matter.’” *not* matter.” LII ” 446 ” 21: medicine *not* medecine LII ” 446 ” 27: medicines *not* medecines LII ” 449 ” 5: medicines *not* medecines LII ” 460 ” 3: anniversary *not* anniversay LIII ” 462 ” 13: perspiring *not* prespiring LIII ” 464 ” 7: peonies *not* peones LIII ” 468 ” 23: haven’t *not* have’nt LIII ” 471 ” 39: Apparent *not* Apparrent LIII ” 476 ” 9: homage *not* hommage LIII ” 476 ” 14: consonant *not* consonnant LIV ” 487 ” 5: trod *not* trode LIV ” 487 ” 12: “This *not* This LIV ” 488 ” 36: Isn’t *not* Is’nt LIV ” 490 ” 15: me?” *not* me? LIV ” 490 ” 19: say, *not* say,” LIV ” 491 ” 23: comfortable *not* confortable LIV ” 495 ” 12: exhilarated *not* exhilerated LIV ” 495 ” 19: smilingly *not* similingly LV ” 503 ” 10: and *not* aud LV ” 507 ” 32: Mrs. *not* “Mrs. LV ” 507 ” 33: making *not* make LVI ” 525 ” 27: Aren’t *not* Are’nt LVI ” 529 ” 18: mustn’t *not* musn’t LVI ” 535 ” 20: notwithstanding *not* nothwithstanding LVI ” 536 ” 36: aren’t *not* are’nt

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