Riding an auspicious cloud, Xiangzi is saluted by Emperor Xianzong

Discoursing on Complete Perfection, Xiangzi chants a poem

If you do not know the inverted inversion within the mystery,
How can you understand how to plant the lotus within the fire?
Lead the white tiger back home to be nurtured,
And you shall produce a bright pearl like the orb of the moon.
Constantly guard the elixir furnace and observe the fire phases,
Attentively observe spirit and breath and let them be natural.
With all yin stripped away and the elixir completed,
You shall leap from your worldly cage and live ten thousand years.¹

When Tuizhi and Lin Gui returned to court to report on their mission, Xiangzi went with them. Tuizhi memorialized,

Having received Your Majesty’s vast blessings from above, and below relied upon the sincere intentions of all officials, we managed to find a Complete Perfection monk from the Zhongnan Mountains whose prayers caused a snowfall of three feet and three inches. Snow covers mountains and forests. Springs, brooks, rivers, and marshes, as well as the irrigation channels, are all full. Grasses and trees are lush again. The people all sing and dance for joy. This is all due to Your Majesty’s plans. The Complete Perfection monk is awaiting your summons outside.
Truly,

*The holy Son of Heaven alone holds the strings of government,*

*His ministers and officials together harmonize its principles.*

Xianzong was overjoyed and said, “If the Complete Perfection monk is here, he may be called in for an audience. We have a reward for him.”

The attending officials quickly transmitted the command, and in no time at all Xiangzi arrived. He did not call out the appropriate greeting, nor did he kneel and kowtow. He remained standing erect in the Hall of the Golden Simurgh and did not perform the rites proper for a subject towards his ruler.

Angrily Xianzong said, “All under Heaven is the king’s land. All living on this land are the king’s subjects. We are the ruler of all under Heaven. From nobles, ministers, and officials above to the common people below, all who have an audience with Us call out the greeting, kneel, and kowtow. You are just an itinerant Daoist who lives within the king’s land—how dare you be so lacking in propriety?”

Xiangzi said, “I live in the immortals’ gardens and the Penglai Isles, not in the king’s land. I ingest the essences of sun and moon and do not eat ordinary food. I do not seek glory and do not hanker after profit and fame. In me the Son of Heaven does not have a subject, and the feudal lords do not have a friend. Why do you want me to practice the vulgar rites of the human world by calling out a greeting and kowtowing?”

“You prayed for snow at the Southern Shrine, you lodge at monasteries, and now you stand in the Hall of the Golden Simurgh. You can hardly say that you do not live in the king’s land,” Xianzong said.

“If you don’t want me to stand on the ground, what’s the problem?” Xiangzi said. He waved his hand and a multicolored cloud lifted him up into the air. “Let me ask you officials: am I the king’s subject?” he called.

When Xianzong saw Xiangzi in the air, his face went gray with fear. He stepped down from his throne, waved to Xiangzi, and said, “Immortal Master, please come forward. We wish to become your disciple.”

“Immortals do not exist!” Tuizhi protested. “The Qin emperor and Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty were led by the nose all their lives by Xu Fu and Li Shaojun, and in the end it did them no good whatsoever. This Complete Perfection monk just knows a few magical tricks with which to confuse the world and cheat the people. He is definitely not a true divine immortal. If you treat him as your teacher, how can you avoid elevating other people’s ambitions and destroying your own authority?”
Riding an auspicious cloud, Xiangzi is saluted by Emperor Xianzong.
Xianzong said, “We had such a severe drought that everything dried up and withered, but by his prayers he caused a great snowfall. When We criticized him somewhat, he floated up into the air. If he is not a divine immortal, how can he have such powers?”

“It is a law of nature that it will rain and snow after a long drought,” Tuizhi said. “I think this Complete Perfection monk understands weather patterns and took advantage of the opportunity. He was just lucky. As for floating on clouds and riding on mists, these are heretical tricks of unorthodox schools, designed to hoodwink the people. If you spray him with the unclean blood of pigs and dogs, he will come crashing down and break every bone in his body. What is unusual about it?”

“You may withdraw temporarily. We shall handle this Ourselves,” Xianzong said.

Chagrin filling his face, Tuizhi angrily left the court.

Only then did Xiangzi come down to stand on the ground and say, “I will return to the mountain wilderness for the time being, and come again for an audience on another day.”

Xianzong said, “The Qin emperor and Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty exhausted their wealth and efforts, but did not get to meet an immortal. Today fate would have it that We meet a master descended from Heaven. How can you not say a word of instruction to Us?”

“You already have the utmost wealth and rank. What else do you want?” Xiangzi asked.

“We seek eternal life,” Xianzong said.

“Eternal life is obtained by people with leisure and without obligations,” Xiangzi said. “They abandon their family bonds, cast away grace and love, hide in the deep mountains and valleys, cultivate and refine themselves from morning to evening, spit out the old and take in the new. Now, your family includes everything within the Four Seas; the people are your children. You have your own discipline of rectifying your mind and making your intentions sincere, and that is enough to benefit the people and preserve your body. How could you seek the way of eternal life, casting away the concerns of rulership as if they were just so many trifles?”

“We suffer many illnesses and drugs are without effect,” Xianzong said. “We request of you an elixir pill to heal Our chronic ailments.”

“Every day you weary your spirit and waste your essence in the river of love and the ocean of lust,” Xiangzi told him. “To try to make up for these losses with drugs made from grass roots and tree bark is as if you had a bagful of gold and
every day replaced some of it with iron. After a long time the gold is used up and the useless iron is left. At that point you want to change the iron into gold—how could that be easy?”

“You are right,” Xianzong said. “Please instruct Us what to do.”

“I am just a mountain rustic and commoner,” Xiangzi replied. “I cannot correct faults, make up for deficiencies, or repair omissions. If from now on you will purify your mind and lessen your desires, nourish your pneuma and preserve your spirit, an extraordinary person will come from the western land to protect your reign for ten thousand years and prolong the people’s blessings for a hundred million years.”

“What kind of person?”

“Although he has died, his bones still exist. If you treasure them and have them stored carefully wrapped up, miraculous events will occur.”

When Xiangzi took his leave, Xianzong was very sad, sighing that he was not destined to have immortality bestowed upon him. Indeed,

With destiny you will meet an immortal a thousand miles away;  
Without it, he won’t stay even though he is facing you.

After several days it was Tuizhi’s birthday. The officials of the Five Garrisons and the Six Ministries, the nine Chief Ministers and the four Grand Councilors, the officials of the Twelve Terraces, the Supervising Secretaries of the Six Offices of Scrutiny, and the Twenty-Four Directors—members of officialdom high and low in rank all came to congratulate him. Here is a song to the tune of “Flying on Clouds” to illustrate it:

As the longevity banquet opens,  
There are longevity fruits on platters in many fresh colors.  
Longevity inscriptions appear on golden cauldrons;  
Longevity wine sparkles in cloudy cups.  
Among the Five Blessings longevity is the foremost.  
Longevity of unbroken years,  
Longevity comparing to that of hills and mounds,  
Longevity whose count of years stretches on without end.  
If only you are willing to seize it,  
Your longevity will compare to the ageless immortals of the Southern Mountain.
Longevity clouds swirl,
Longevity candles burn on high, illuminating the banquet.
The longevity star of the South Pole manifests itself;
Longevity peaches are proffered at the Western Pond.
Longevity cranes dance gracefully,
Promising longevity of ten thousand years.
Longevity comparing to that of lofty pines,
Not afraid of the shears of wind and frost.
If only you are willing to seize it,
Your longevity will compare to the ageless immortals of the Penglai Isles.

Birthday congratulations wish longevity like that of the Southern Mountain,
Ten thousand years without end, and all blessings complete.
Longevity flowers, gorgeous one and all;
Longevity speeches uttering praises with every word.
May the count of your years be increased in the land of the immortals,
Longevity without end.
The days roll by,
Year by year turns over.
If only you are willing to seize it,
Your longevity will compare to the ageless immortals of the East.

Longevity wine is poured again and again,
The guests are numerous at this sumptuous feast.
Longevity comparing to the vigor of the numinous chun tree,
Longevity that allows you to observe the changes of the universe over eons.
If you obtain longevity, you meet each New Year with joy,
Knowing you will enjoy longevity all year long.
Longevity is a good fortune,
And your life will be limitless.
If only you are willing to seize it,
Your longevity will compare to the ageless immortals of Kunlun.

On this day Tuizhi invited the officials to drink wine in the main hall. Although there were no extraordinary delicacies or unusual fruits, the food was all palat-
able and filled the stomach. Flute and zither were played to give joy to heart and
eyes. Tuizhi ordered Zhang Qian and Li Wan, together with a group of servants,
to guard the main and side doors and not let any idlers disrupt the banquet.

When Xiangzi, up in the air, heard this, he lowered his cloud. Fisher drum
and clapper in hand, he went straight to Tuizhi’s gate and wanted to walk inside.

Zhang Qian stopped him and said, “My master likes to beat Buddhists and
scold Daoists. Fortunately, as today is his birthday banquet and a hundred offi-
cials are in the main hall drinking wine, he hasn’t seen you, otherwise you would
have gotten yourself a beating and a dressing down. You’d better leave right
away.”

“Why does your master dislike these two classes of people?” Xiangzi asked.

“Formerly the master liked the Dao,” Zhang Qian said. “But a number of years
ago two uncouth Daoists from the Zhongnan Mountains lured the master’s nephew
away. Thereafter the master ceased his interest in Daoism and no longer trusted
Buddhists or Daoists.”

Xiangzi laughed and said, “I am not a disciple of Buddha or Laozi. In fact, I
am the ancestor of all critics of Buddhism and the first of all detractors of Dao-
ism. It’s only because I have no taste for studying and cannot make a living any
other way that I beat the fisher drum and sing Daoist songs in this disorderly
fashion, disguising myself as a Daoist. If today is your master’s birthday, may I
trouble you to put in a word for me and let me beg some wine and food to appease
my hunger? It will be a good deed on your part.”

“Letting you inside is not the problem,” Li Wan said. “The problem is that I
might get implicated and get a beating.”

“Tell him that the Daoist Zhuo Wei from the Zhongnan Mountains requests
to see him,” Xiangzi said. “This will definitely not create trouble for you.”

“Brother Li, this young Daoist comes from the Zhongnan Mountains,”
Zhang Qian said. “Perhaps he knows the young gentleman. If today we do not
announce him, we’ll be blamed later if the Daoist stops the master on his way to
or from court to tell him about it, and the master then investigates who guarded
the gate today. It might be better to announce him and let the master make his
own decision.”

“You’re right, Brother,” Li Wan said.

Zhang Qian thereupon went slowly into the banquet room and in an unoc-
cupied moment reported to Tuizhi, “Outside there is a young Daoist who says he
is from the Zhongnan Mountains and wants to see you.”

“It must be that snow-praying Daoist Zhuo Wei,” Tuizhi said. “If it’s him, don’t
let him in.”
“He doesn’t look or sound like him,” Zhang Qian said.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s him or not,” Tuizhi said. “This morning I ordered you to carefully guard the gates and not let any idlers come in and disrupt the banquet. Why do you come and report to me on behalf of this young Daoist? You should get a sound beating, but I will forgive you this once.”

Zhang Qian gathered his courage and in a low voice said again, “How would I dare report to you in contravention of your orders? However, since ancient times it has been said, ‘In the whole world only the Dao is to be honored.’ Today is your birthday and the fact that this Daoist has come from afar to seek a meeting clearly means that you alone are to be honored.”

So Tuizhi saluted his guests with folded hands and said, “Please remain seated for a while. I will fetch a young Daoist to join our company.”

Zhang Qian quickly ran to the gate and said, “The master is coming out.” He seized Xiangzi and said, “I have gone to a lot of trouble to put in a word for you. I almost got to feel the bamboo stick for it. If I hadn’t been able to talk my way out of it, I would have gotten into trouble on your account. Now, when the master comes out, you will answer him carefully. If he gives you something as a reward, you will share it with me, giving me 30 percent of the gains. Don’t hog it all for yourself.”

At that moment they saw Tuizhi coming out. Everyone moved aside and arranged themselves in orderly rows, pushing Xiangzi behind their backs. Xiangzi said to himself, “How sad! Away from home people are worth little, while things become more valuable. When I lived here formerly, everyone feared me. Today they push me behind their backs.”

Tuizhi opened his mouth and called, “Where is the young Daoist from the Zhongnan Mountains?”

The others pushed Xiangzi roughly in front of Tuizhi. When Tuizhi saw Xiangzi, he recognized him as the young Daoist who had prayed for snow and said, “Where do you live? Why have you come here from the Zhongnan Mountains?”

Xiangzi said, “My home is under the astral palace of the Northern Dipper, and I play leisurely among the white jade towers of Southern Heaven. Formerly I cultivated myself with my masters in the Zhongnan Mountains, and thus I came from there.”

Tuizhi laughed and said, “This Daoist is young, but he talks big. I think my Xiangzi, who is drifting around in the world, must be similar in demeanor.”

Xiangzi had already known what Tuizhi was going to say and so said, “The clothes worn by the young gentleman are not even as good as mine, sir.”

“Let me ask you,” Tuizhi said, “You ascetics die without descendants to see
you off after a life of a hundred years. What good is in this that it should be worth imitating?"

“People raise good-for-nothing children who just do mischief so that they become the object of gossip and cause their ancestors to lose face,” Xiangzi replied. "This is no match for the unfettered life of cultivation. Though you may love your sons and daughters dearly, when one day Death arrives, who will take your place on the wheel of rebirth?"

“In my view, family life and taking care of the affairs of the world are more important than personal cultivation,” Tuizhi said. 

“Sir, do you know that days pass quickly like the shuttle on the loom and that time flies like an arrow? The spring of youth will never come again when white hair covers the head. You must know that

\begin{quote}
Health in old age is like the lingering cold of the spring or the remaining heat of autumn,
Like a bright lamp that has burned all night, like the moon at dawn,
Like dew on branches, like frost on a wooden bridge,
Like floating bubbles on water, like snow on mountain peaks.
\end{quote}

“As you are standing here outside the gate, I’ll give you a riddle,” Tuizhi said. “If you can solve it, I’ll give you wine and food. If you can’t answer, get away quickly and don’t talk rubbish here.”

“I am listening,” Xiangzi said. 

“The minister asks the Complete Perfection monk: Why did you come here?”

“I can divine the moon on the horizon and light the lamp under water.”

“If there is no dust on the rock, how can you come to a conclusion?”

“By having the body riddled with a thousand iron awls.”

“Can there be an inextinguishable fire in a stove?”

“Pull down a great river and pour it over the fire.”

Tuizhi quietly ordered Zhang Qian, “Put two stalks of grass on your head and go sit on the wooden crossbeam of the second gate. Let’s see what he says.”

Zhang Qian did as he was told and sat firmly on the gate, two stalks of grass on his head. When Xiangzi saw him he walked inside. Li Wan stopped him and said, “Where do you think you are going?”

Xiangzi replied, “My lord Han has invited me to drink tea.” Tuizhi could not keep from laughing and returned to his seat at the banquet.

Xiangzi entered after him, remained standing before the stairs, and chanted a poem.
“Building a thatched hut in front of a mountain,
I escape the bonds of golden cangues and jade locks.
Light heartedly dwelling at the forest spring truly is to be at peace,
The bright moon’s disc is suspended from the tip of my staff.”

Having finished chanting, he took the fisher drum and sang to the “Golden Oriole” tune:

“The bright moon’s disc is suspended from the tip of my staff,
When it comes to pure leisure,
Who can compare to me?
Green pines and cypresses are my constant companions.
I observe the wild monkeys in front of the cliff;
I listen to cuckoos in the branches.
The green mountains and waters are truly exquisite.
Thinking of the forests and springs,
The mind has no worries.
Among the mountain torrents,
I can give myself up to pleasure.”

Then he stepped forward, saluted, and said, “Sirs, I knock my head.” Scholar Lin hurriedly left his seat to return the greeting.

“What high official or prince has come to attend my birthday party that we should leave our seats to receive him?” Tuizhi said.

“I am just being polite to this Daoist,” Scholar Lin said.

“You are demeaning yourself,” Tuizhi said. Then he called to the servants, “Pour a golden goblet and put it here. Anyone who wants to commend the Daoist first has to drink three cups.”

“Sir, today you have three causes for joy. Do you know what they are?” Scholar Lin said.

“What three causes for joy do I have?”

“When during this great drought the people were all afraid, at the Southern Shrine you prayed for and got three feet and three inches of snow. In his joy the emperor promoted you to Minister of Rites. Is this no cause for joy?”

“It was brought about by the emperor’s vast blessings and the officials’ pious hearts. What merit do I have?” Tuizhi replied.
“Today is your birthday. Except for the emperor, all the court officials have come to celebrate. This is the second cause for joy,” Scholar Lin said.

“For your misplaced affection for me, my gratitude knows no bounds.” Scholar Lin continued, “When everyone had just congratulated you, a divine immortal appeared singing of ‘the bright moon suspended from the tip of his staff.’ That surely is the third joy!”

“In ancient times the Queen Mother had her immortality peach banquet and the Eight Immortals wished her long life. A single thread does not make silk, a single tree does not make a forest. We have here a single Daoist—what divine immortal are you talking about?” Tuizhi said.

“You have long studied Daoism. Can you solve the riddle of ‘the bright moon suspended from the tip of a staff’?” asked Scholar Lin.

“I do not know it,” Tuizhi replied.

Scholar Lin said, “The character for ‘bright’ consists of the sun and moon, which together pace the sky day and night. The staff is the kind of staff old farmers lean on, or the Chan staff of the Buddhist monk, or Laozi’s immortal’s staff. ‘To suspend’ means ‘to hang.’ Formerly Laozi plucked down the words ‘bright moon’ and hung them from his immortal’s staff. He carried the staff as he rode on the black ox out through the Hangu Pass to deliver, in the east, the great sages to become immortals, and, in the west, the barbarians to become Buddhas. In the south he answered Confucius’s questions about the rites, and thus began the long series of immortals through the ages. I have a poem to praise him:

“The bright moon’s disc suspended from the tip of his staff,
Roaming freely, he leaves his grotto-heaven.
A green simurgh flies elegantly,
A white crane dances gracefully.
Wine overflows the golden cups in sparkles,
Flowers open on jade trees in fresh colors.
He wishes you many blessings and longevity,
Yielding not to Patriarch Peng of old.”

“You praise him too much,” Tuizhi said.

Xiangzi stepped forward and said to Tuizhi, “My lord Han, I respectfully come to congratulate you on your birthday.”

“As an ascetic you do not shoulder worldly responsibilities, and you do not understand when to advance and when to withdraw,” Tuizhi said. “Because the
other day your prayers caused the auspicious snowfall, I specifically petitioned
the emperor to reward you, but you refused over and over again. At this banquet
today all the guests are retainers and ministers of the emperor. How could we tol-
erate an ascetic like you in such a place? You surely know that the Daoist priests
and Buddhist monks in the empire all receive their ordination certificates from
the Ministry of Rites. Listen to this:

“In the mountains, jungles grow profusely;
Living on thin rice and yellow leeks is very bitter.
I let you, divine immortal, be a Daoist,
But you must submit to the control of the Ministry of Rites.”

“My lord Han, stop bragging,” Xiangzi said. “The Buddhist monks and Daoist
priests of the empire may all submit to the control of the Ministry of Rites, but I
am an immediate retainer of the Queen Mother, and Inner Minister in the Palace
of the Jade Emperor. Human rank is not as high as celestial rank. How would you
control me? I too have a poem that I would like you to listen to:

“The Son of Heaven of the Tang dynasty sits in his throne hall,
His officials all aligned in orderly rows.
The Buddhists and Daoists of this world submit to official control,
But how could an ordinary mortal dare control a divine immortal?”

Tuizhi said, “Divine immortals have always had an extraordinary appearance. They
are endowed with an extraordinary destiny. Their brows and eyes are clear; their
earlobes touch their shoulders. Their spirit is brilliant and their pneuma full. Their
essence is complete and their body well nourished. Only then are they divine
immortals. You are a sallow, skinny, and unbearably ugly fellow, nothing but an
unlicensed, vagrant Daoist. How dare you speak such grand words?”

“I have some more grand words for you,” Xiangzi said. “In the time it takes
to turn my back, Heaven and Earth become narrow; in the twinkling of my eyes
sun and moon darken. In my hand the pillars of Heaven are lined up; under my
feet the waves of the ocean are calmed. The mountains are my teeth; moss and
plants are my hair roots. The sands of the River of Eternity are my food; through
my pores shine the stars. If you raise your head to look, you will realize how rare
such persons are.”

“These are the words of begging proselytizers. I don’t want to listen to them,”
Tuizhi said.
“You call me a proselytizer, but I am unable to live up to that designation,” Xiangzi said.

“What’s so good about proselytizing that you say you can’t live up to it?” Tuizhi pursued.

“The Most High Lord Lao manifested himself as the Ritual Master of the Ten Thousand Methods in the Upper Era of the Three Sovereigns, while in their Middle Era he was known as Sir Pan Gu,” Xiangzi replied. “In the time of Fu Xi, his name was Master Denseflower, and in the reign of the Divine Farmer it was Master Great Attainment. Under the Yellow Emperor, his name was Master Far-reaching Attainment; under Shaohao, Master Following Response; under Zhuanxu, Master Red Essence; under Emperor Ku, Master Lutu; under Emperor Yao, Master Who Has Completed his Striving; under Emperor Shun, Master Yinshou; under Yu, Master Who Has Perfected His Practice; and under King Tang, Master Xize.

“At the time of Tang Jia he divided his spirit and transformed his pneuma and lodged in the womb of the Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder for eighty-one years, until he was born under a plum tree in Quren Village of Lai District of Ku County in the land of Chu. Pointing to the plum tree, he took Li (‘plum’) as his surname; his personal name was Er (‘ear’), his style Boyang, and his posthumous name Dan. In the time of King Wu of Zhou, he served first as palace librarian, then as archivist. In the time of King Zhao, he crossed the Hangu Pass, on which occasion he delivered the guardian of the pass, Yin Xi.

“Later he descended at the Black Sheep Shop in Shu to meet again with Yin Xi and together with him deliver the barbarian lands beyond the desert. It was only in the time of King Mu that he returned to China. In the age of King Ping, he left China again to bring transformation to the kings of Su and Lin. Again he returned to China.

“In the twenty-first year of King Ling, Confucius was born. In the seventh year of King Jing, Confucius inquired after the Dao with Lord Lao. As he withdrew, Confucius sighed that Lord Lao was ‘like a dragon.’

“In the time of King Lie, he traversed the state of Qin. After Duke Xian of Qin had inquired with him after his destiny, Laozi left by the San Pass. In the reign of King Nan, he flew up to Mount Kunlun. In the Qin dynasty, he descended to the banks of the Gorge River, where, under the name of Elder on the River, he instructed Master Anqiu.

“Thus, the Dao was honored, and its virtue cherished through the ages—that’s what being a proselytizer is about! For my part, I dwell in the turbid world, and turbid words leave my mouth as I move among common humans—how could I therefore deserve the appellation of ‘proselytizer’?”
“The words of a good man are few, those of a coarse man many,” Tuizhi said. “The words of him whose heart harbors doubts are scattered. You are clearly a pauper who relies on his tongue to earn himself some alms. Get out of my sight!”

“The ancient sages and worthies also used to beg for food. Why do you demand that I do not do so?” Xiangzi said.

“When did the sages and worthies ever beg for food?” Tuizhi asked.

“Confucius roamed the empire with three thousand disciples and seventy-two worthies. At Chen, when their grain ran out, do you think the sage and the worthies did not go out to beg for food?”

“I ask you again: between Heaven and Earth what is called the Dao? What is called man?”

“The Dao is that which embraces Heaven and Earth,” Xiangzi said. “He whose body exists in emptiness is called man. As for such ‘men,’ there exists not a single one between Heaven and Earth.”

“Gentlemen, this young Daoist is mad,” Tuizhi said.

“I am not mad,” Xiangzi replied.

“This banquet room is full of court officials and ministers. Quite a few people are here. If you are not mad, why do you say there is not one man?” Tuizhi asked.

“There are men, but they are false men,” Xiangzi said.

“If we are false, who is true?” Tuizhi said angrily.

“Only I am a true man,” said Xiangzi.

“How do you distinguish true and false?” Tuizhi asked.

“I come without a shadow, I leave without a trace. I disperse myself to become pneuma, I gather myself to become form. I pass through metal and stones and suffer no obstruction. I endure as long as Heaven and Earth. The time it takes for rocks to rot and oceans to dry up is just a moment for me. Lord Yama and his ghostly judges all submit and acknowledge their lower position. Am I not then a true man? As for ordinary people, they use a single breath for ten thousand things, but when one day Death comes, all their affairs come to an end. They may be famous and rich, but who of them can overcome death? Are they not false men?”

The officials did not know how to reply to these words. Tuizhi asked, “What does ‘complete perfection’ mean?”

“When one’s essence and pneuma are not wasted, and the yang spirit is not dispersed; when one supplements the elixir fields and opens the stomach lodge; when one lives without disease in eternal youth for a thousand years—this is ‘completeness,’” Xiangzi said. “When in the winter one needs no stove and in the sum-
mer no fan; when cold and heat do not affect one and water and fire cannot harm one—this is ‘perfection.’”

“When birds fly and fish dive, do you consider that they do it with or without deliberation?” Tuizhi asked.

“If they did it with deliberation, they would have to struggle and would inevitably fall or sink,” Xiangzi answered. “If they did it without deliberation, they would forget what they were about and would also inevitably fall or sink. The space between the presence and absence of deliberation is called the movement of the heavenly force. If it didn’t move it couldn’t be called a force. That by which the force is moved is Heaven. All things are moved by the force and sent to oblivion by the force. And in each case it is due to their Heaven-endowed nature.”

“Although this Daoist is young, he knows how to talk,” Tuizhi said.

“What have you come here for?” Scholar Lin asked Xiangzi.

“I have come to congratulate the lord Han on his birthday, and to beg alms from the other lords.”

“If you have come to beg for alms, why don’t I see you give us a kowtow?” Tuizhi said.

“Because yesterday I was very drunk and got back late, I didn’t make it in time to the gate of Southern Heaven,” Xiangzi said. “Next I tried the Penglai Isles, then the Peach Spring Grotto, but each time I was too late. When I finally got to the Chaoyang Grotto at Mount Hua in Shaanxi, its gate also was closed. Those two idlers Cool Breeze and Bright Moon wouldn’t let me in. I hurried towards the Bixia Grotto at Mount Wudang, but on the way I happened to see the goddess Bixia Yuanjun, who told me she was on her way somewhere else. And so I returned to the gate of Southern Heaven and napped for a while on the Seven Stars Rock. All that strenuous walking has overtaxed my back. Therefore I hope you won’t blame me if I cannot kowtow.”

“Crazy Daoist, can you chant a poem?” Tuizhi said.

“In my youth I used to study, and I can chant some verses.”

“Then describe the affairs of the immortals to us in a poem.”

Xiangzi chanted,

“A mulberry orchard changes into an ocean, an ocean into an orchard—
Such words may seem hard to believe.
Riding the mists and mounting clouds, why would I count the days?
Eating clouds and swallowing pneuma, I don’t notice the passing years.
As the moon moves, flower shadows come to my window,
While the wind brings the sounds of the pines to my pillow’s side,
Having danced with my long sword, I brew some tea for tasting,
Having chanted a new poem, I go to sleep embracing my zither.”

“Han, this poem really has merit. Tell him to sing a Daoist song and then we’ll give him his alms,” Scholar Lin said.

Xiangzi lightly drummed on his fisher drum and clapper and sang:

“Lord Han, do not worry,
Death is just about to come.
I may eat yellow leeks and thin rice,
But they are superior to choice delicacies.
Though you may own ten thousand strings of cash,
This wealth cannot be relied upon.
Think of Shi Chong’s prosperity and Deng Tong’s money;
When death came, it all returned to emptiness.
I am better off playing the zither when in a melancholy mood,
Playing the song of the cranes crying in the ninth marsh,
Without glory, without shame, without troubles.
Roaming freely, I slowly beat the fisher drum,
Visiting the fisherman and the woodcutter,
My old friends.

“And here is a poem:

“A long line of nobles in purple gowns,
In their grand chariots, they give themselves heroic airs.
Though they receive a thousand bushels of grain as salary,
They have not yet lessened the people’s suffering by one little bit.
The good wine in their glasses is the people’s blood,
The rich mutton they have minced is the people’s fat.
If those in office do not aid the people,
Then they wrongly receive the court’s emoluments.”

Tuizhi said angrily, “The words of this crazy Daoist are not fit to be listened to. Zhang Qian, throw him out and don’t let anyone else come in.”

“Although I am a crazy Daoist, I have sung a Daoist song in return for some
wine with which to toast the gentlemen present. Why are you having me thrown out?” Xiangzi said.

However, Zhang Qian and Li Wan allowed him to say nothing further, but quickly pushed him out the door. Indeed,

*When you drink with an intimate friend, a thousand cups are not excessive,*

*But if you speak at an inopportune time, half a sentence is too much.*

If you do not know whether Xiangzi left or not, listen to the next chapter.