Chapter 39. A Companion

Song of Cinnabar Hill

Cinnabar Hill — oh, he loves holy immortals! Mornings he drinks the pure flow of Ying River, evenings he returns to the purple smoke of Song Mountain summit. Its thirty-six peaks! The great encircling!

The great encircling — oh, he tracks comets and rainbows. Mounted on a flying dragon, the wind born from his ears, he traverses the Yellow River, strides across the Eastern Sea, and goes everywhere like the sky. I know your roaming heart and mind go on without exhaustion.

Yuan Danqiu 元丹丘 (n.d.), a dearest friend, Li Bo’s closest companion in Dao. His uncommon surname means “original,” his given name means Cinnabar Hill. “How Cinnabar Hill loves immortals,” Li writes. They met in their late twenties, roamed off and on for two decades, studied with the same master, and loved wine. “Young Cinnabar Hill,” writes Li in one of his most
celebrating poems, “drink up!” Another time Li Bo writes to him:

I have been long at Lu River and Mount Huo, and you, dear Cinnabar Hill, roam at Mount Song nearby. We come and go inseparable, in the profound feelings of an old friendship. I get your many letters from retreat, inviting me to go live with you, and joyfully I receive your deep intention. Perhaps I’ll drop everything, and take my whole family, and go there and not return. And I write to you, that we may roam together.

So here is one more poem:

Parting from Cinnabar Hill at Yingyang, on my way to Huaiyang

Master Cinnabar Hill, you and I are brothers from different families.
No ties of office, just the plain intimacy of mist at dawn.
We both chafe in the nets of the world, our deep longings remain unfulfilled.
Pine and cypress stay true through the cold, they’d be ashamed to chase springtimes like peach and plum.
The endless needs of marketplace and court will stain and scrape your jade-white face.
What they take is heavier than mountains, what they give is lighter than dust.
Our souls get gradually overgrown with weeds, age and decline join force against us.
But I have a parting gift in a secret satchel that you can use to sustain yourself, and we shall feast on the golden elixir
and lodge with Master Hu!
No use to build things here,
a lifetime flashing by in a single day.
Now I leave you, on my way southeast
through endless sorrows.
Our old vows don’t shift,
we keep them through all our journeys.
That’s all. Goings and comings,
white clouds flying through the Milky Way.\textsuperscript{335}

潁陽別元丹丘之淮陽

吾將元夫子，異姓為天倫
本無軒裳契，素以煙霞親
嘗恨迫世網，銘意俱未伸
松柏雖寒苦，羞逐桃李春
悠悠市朝間，玉顏日緇磷
所失重山岳，所得輕埃塵
精魄漸蕪穢，衰老相憑因
我有錦囊訣，可以持君身
當餐黃金藥，去為紫陽賓
萬事難并立，百年猶崇晨
別爾東南去，悠悠多悲辛
前志庶不易，遠途期所遵
已矣歸去來，白雲飛天津