

THE BIRTH OF THE THIRD PRINCE, LI NO-CHA

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COMMENTS

Presented below in comparatively simple terms expressly for the benefit of students interested in acquiring a knowledge of the English language is the story in two instalments of Li No-cha (李哪吒), or the Third Prince (三太子) as distinct from the Third Prince Ao Ping (敖丙), the third son of Ao Kuang (敖光), the dragon-king of the Eastern Sea, one of four such dragons believed in the old days to have descended into the oceans of the four quarters of the earth to administer marine affairs by Celestial Edict directly from the Jade Emperor (玉帝), or the Supreme Ruler, the highest in the Taoist hierarchy.

The story occurs as an episode in three chapters in the Feng-shen-pang Yen-I (封神榜演義), or "Roll of Immortals to be Apotheosized," a historical romance replete with myths. It was written in the Ming Dynasty (明朝) (A.D. 1368-1644) by an unknown author who presented it as a dowry to his younger daughter on the occasion of her marriage. Her husband subsequently had it published, little dreaming that it was to become over the years a most widely read work in China.

The Feng-shen-pang needs no introduction to Chinese students and, as they are more or less familiar with the details, I will refrain from boring them with a discussion here, beyond mentioning the fact that Li No-cha and his father Li Ching (李靖) or Pagoda-bearing Heavenly King Li (托塔李天王) belong, strictly speaking, to Buddhism, as do many others given treatment in the Feng-shen-pang Yen-I. In the Buddhist pantheon No-cha is Natha while his putative father, Li Ching, is Vaisravana. It may be of interest to know that Buddhism and Taoism borrow freely one from the other.

Of interest is also the fact that in spiritual seances conducted by Taoist priests particularly in rural areas where superstition still holds sway today, No-cha or Natha, as a Taoist deity, is often called in for aid in dispelling evil influences or in healing diseases. No-cha is popularly depicted as having three heads, nine eyes and eight hands each holding a magical weapon and sometimes as having one head, three eyes, two hands holding a spear in fighting posture and two feet astride of two fiery winged wheels. It is death to any evil spirit who has the misfortune of encountering such a formidable adversary.

The story as given here is more an adaptation of the original than a translation, and it is hoped that students will derive as much pleasure from reading the English version as from the original. I am afraid, however, that for some constant reference to the dictionary may be necessary, a tedious enough task, I must admit, but since it is in the interests of acquiring a knowledge of English linked as it is today with our medical pursuits, I hope that it will not prove to be too discouraging. I am sure that persevering and determined students will eventually find the labour a rewarding experience. After all, Rome was not built in a day.

The brigadier-general in command of the troops garrisoning the Ch'en-t'ang Kuan (陳塘關, Ch'en-t'ang Pass) was Li Ching (李靖), who when young studied the Way (道) under the Immortal Tu-O (度厄真人) of the west of K'un Lun Shan (西崑崙山 Mt. K'un Lun). While he had acquired a knowledge of the magical arts, he found attainment to immortality difficult of realisation, and consequently left his mountain retreat to take service with King Chou (紂王) (1154 B.C. - 1122 B.C.) and pass the remainder of his days in plenty and ease among his fellow-mortals.

Li Ching had by his wife of the Yin (殷) family two sons: Chin-cha (金吒), the elder, and Mu-cha (木吒), the younger. She was now with child again, having been pregnant for three years and six months without betraying the slightest signs of parturition. Worried and suspicious, Li Ching pointing to her belly one day said, "You have been with child for three years and more now without so much as showing signs of giving birth to what you have been bearing. It must be something strange or monstrous!" His wife more worried than ever could not but agree.

That self-same night toward the third watch (midnight) Mrs. Li returned to her chamber and went to bed. Bitten by doubt and anxiety she was tossing restlessly unable to get a wink of sleep until the wee hours of the morning when she fell into a troubled slumber. She thought she saw a priest with flowing beard and in Taoist garb enter her bedroom. She rebuked him roundly for this unwarranted intrusion, but he simply said, "Lady, be prepared to receive the unicorn." Before she could reply, the Taoist pushed an object into her belly. She woke up with a start, cold sweat breaking out all over her body. She had Li Ching roused and told of her strange dream, asking at the same time what it portended. Hardly had she finished speaking when she felt a sharp pain in the belly.

Li Ching went to the front hall and seated himself on a clay stool, thinking that she must now be in the throes of childbirth and, if so, praying that she would have a safe delivery. At this moment in rushed two white-faced, terror-stricken maidservants, who gasped out, "My lord, her ladyship has just given birth to a monster!" Whereupon, with sword in hand Li Ching entered his wife's chamber to investigate. He saw the room enveloped in a red light; indeed, the whole house was effused with a strange fragrance.

What met his eye was the astonishing spectacle of a dripping ball of flesh gyrating like a wheel round the room! He split it open with his sword. There was a sound of escaping air, and out from the ball of flesh leapt a small sprightly child, frisking about the room, his body bathed in a glorious light. His face was white as if it had been freshly powdered; wound round the wrist of his right hand

was a gold bracelet; a piece of red damask adorned the upper part of his body and shot forth dazzling rays of light.

This divine being subsequently became one of the van-leaders of the expeditionary forces led by Chiang Tzu-ya (姜子牙) against King Chou toward the close of the Shang (商) or Yin (殷) Dynasty (1766 B.C. - 1122 B.C.) He was an avatar of Ling Chu-tzu (靈珠子 the Intelligent Pearl). His gold bracelet was the Heaven-and-earth Bracelet, and his red damask was called Chaotic Heavenly Damask. These were the treasures of the Chin-kuang Tung (金光洞 Grotto of the Golden Light) on Ch'ien-yuan Shan (朝元山, Mt. Heaven).

The child was skipping about in the room. Li Ching thought this rather extraordinary but nonetheless bent down and scooped it up in his arms. There was nothing strange about it; in fact, it was a perfectly normal, healthy child. The suspicion he had entertained that it might have been a monster disappeared, so did the thought of destroying him. Instead a natural feeling of paternal love came over him. He brought it over to his wife to see, and, like him, she immediately fell in love with it. Everybody was happy at the turn events took.

The following day many of Li Ching's subordinates came to offer their congratulations. Just as Li Ching had seen off the last of his well-wishers, his adjutant came in to announce the presence of a Taoist priest to see him. Li Ching, who could not forget that it was to Taoism that he owed his affluence and high position in the army, hastily said, "Show him in." The priest entered the great hall and, after the exchange of the usual salutations, was offered a seat. The priest seated himself without much ado or ceremony. "Whence has the venerable teacher come and to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" asked Li Ching. "This poor Taoist is T'ai-I Chen-Jen (太乙真人) of Chin-kuang Tung, on Ch'ien-yuan Shan. I have heard of Mrs. Li's having given birth to a boy and have come expressly to offer my congratulations." replied the Taoist, I wonder if I might see the child." Li Ching gave orders for the child to be brought. A little later the servant returned with it in his arms, when the Taoist took it over with both hands and gave it a critical look. "What was the hour of his birth?" he asked. "At about the fourth watch (1.00-3.00 a.m.)" answered Li Ching. The Taoist after a rapid calculation with his fingers observed that it was villainomened. "Could it be that the child would not enjoy a long life?" Li Ching was anxious to know. "No, but he will commit one thousand and seven hundred violations of the commandment not to kill. Incidentally, has he been given a name yet?" enquired the Taoist. "No, not yet," replied Li Ching. "Then let this poor Taoist give him a name. Would you permit him to be my disciple?" asked the Taoist. "Certainly," answered Li Ching. "How many children have you, General?" questioned the Taoist. Li Ching replied, "I have three sons: the eldest, Chin-cha (金吒), is a disciple of Wen-shu Kwang-fa Tien-tsun (文殊廣法天尊) of the Yun-hsiao Tung (雲霄洞, Grotto of the Fleecy Clouds) on Wu-Lung Shan (五龍山, Mt. Five Dragons), and the elder, Mu-cha (木吒), a disciple of Pu-hsien Chen-jen (普賢真人) of Pai-ho Tung (白鶴洞, Grotto of the White Cranes) on Chiu-kung Shan (九宮山, Mt. Nine Palaces). Since the master wishes to have my youngest son as his disciple, I beg that a name be bestowed on him to consummate the arrangement." The Taoist accordingly named him "No-cha (哪吒)." "I am extremely grateful for this gesture," said Li Ching, who at once ordered vegetarian dishes to be prepared. But the Taoist declined, saying: "I must return to my grotto immediately to attend to an important matter. Thank you all

the same." Li Ching could not but escort him to the door, and the Taoist then and there took his leave.

One day, having nothing to do, Li Ching was sitting in his quarters, when there came news of the rebellion of four hundred feudal princes. He at once saw to the defences of the pass, particularly Yeh-ma-ling (野馬嶺, Mt. Wild Hoarse), a strategic point, and drilled the forces under his command to meet any contingencies that might arise.

Seven years had passed since then, and No-cha, now seven years of age, had grown to a height of six feet. It was the fifth month, and the weather was unbearably hot. Marquis Chiang Wen-huan of the east (東伯侯 姜文煥) had risen in rebellion, and Li Ching gave battle at Yu-hun Kuan (遊魂關, Pass of the Wandering Souls). On this account, he was busy digging trenches and drilling his army every day.

We will now turn to No-cha, the Third Prince, as he was known then as now. Finding the heat rather oppressive, he went in to see his mother, mother, and, respectfully at one side, asked if he might go outside the pass and play for a while. Mrs. Li, being fond of her children, as all mothers are, gave her consent, adding: "Bring a retainer with you and remember to return home early, as your father will soon be back from drilling his soldiers. "I understand, mother," replied No-cha, who in the company of a retainer went out of the pass. After travelling for more than a li, No-cha called a halt, as he was perspiring profusely, the day being exceedingly hot. He asked the retainer to scour the woods for a shady tree to rest under and cool himself. The retainer found a large willow tree by the side of a river of green waters coursing over some rocks, and ran back to tell No-cha, who was, naturally, delighted with the discovery. Hastening into a grove, he divested himself of his coat and sat down in the shade of the willow tree to cool himself. A little later he rose and ran toward the river. "It was extremely hot as I came out of the pass," he said to the retainer, "and I simply stink with the smell of sweat. I am going to give myself a thorough rub-down on this rock." The retainer warned No-cha, "I'm afraid His Lordship may have returned home by now, and I would advise you to be quick about it, or you will catch it from him." "Never mind," said No-cha. Taking off the rest of his clothing, he seated himself on the rock, and immersed his seven-foot long "Chaotic Heavenly" damask in the water, preparatory to washing himself, little knowing that the river, a tributary of the Eastern Sea, led directly to the Crystal Palace, the abode of the dragon-king. The water immediately turned red. He was still splashing his damask in the water. With each splash the palace shook so violently that it threatened to fall apart. It happened that Ao Kuang, the dragon-king of the Eastern Sea was sitting idly at the time, when suddenly he felt the whole palace was rocking. He hurriedly summoned his guards, saying: "There should be no earthquake at this time of the year, but why is the palace shaking so?" He commanded the Yaksha, Li Lang, to ascertain the cause of this unseasonal occurrence. The Yaksha rose to the surface and began to look round for the cause. He blinked and gaped at the sight for before him was a wide expanse of red waters. Suddenly his eyes rested upon a youth washing himself with a piece of red silk which he dipped into the water every now and then. He shouted, "Hey! You there! What do you mean by discolouring the waters of this river and shaking the palace?" No-cha turned round and saw a creature with a blue face, hair like the colour of cinnabar, a huge mouth with tasks,

and a big axe in one hand. "What kind of an animal are you spouting the speech of humans?" asked No-cha. Bristling with anger, the Yaksha replied, "I am a Yaksha patrolling the sea by command of my lord, the dragon-king. How dare you call me animal?"

The Yaksha leapt ashore and aimed his axe at No-cha's head. Naked as he was, No-cha followed suit and, seeing the Yaksha coming so fiercely at him, hastily took off the bracelet from his wrist and threw it up into the air. How could he, the Yaksha, withstand this Chaotic Heavenly treasure from the chest of the Golden Light Grotto? It descended on the Yaksha's head, splitting it into two, and the brain came oozing out. Going near the corpse, No-cha smilingly observed, "You have soiled my bracelet," and returned to the rock. He dipped the bracelet into the water and washed off the blood with his piece of damask. The Crystal Palace received several violent jolts and was dangerously near collapsing. The furniture and everything else in the palace were lying at sixes and sevens on the floor.

Ao Kuang said, "Li Lang, the Yaksha, has not yet returned from his investigations, and the palace is still rocking, only more violently than before!" At this moment dragon soldiers came scurrying in to report the death of the Yaksha at the hands of a youth. Ao Kuang was alarmed, and then grew furious, saying: "He was a divine being assigned to patrol duty. Who on earth had the temerity to kill him? I am going to see who it is." He was giving orders for a company of soldiers to accompany him when Ao Kuang's third son, Ao Ping (敖丙), came out and asked, "Why is Your Majesty so angry?" Whereupon Ao Kuang gave him the details of the death of Li Lang. The third prince offered to go in his stead and bring back the culprit. His father assenting, he took his halberd and mounting his marine beast left the palace with a company of dragon soldiers.

Suddenly the waves shot up several feet high, and No-cha wondering stood up and looked around him, exclaiming, "What big waves!" He saw to his surprise a young man of martial appearance mounting a marine beast emerge to the surface of the turbulent waters. The rider was in a multi-coloured dress, with a halberd in one hand, and looked unmistakably warlike. When Ao Ping saw No-cha, he asked in a thunderous voice, "Who was it that killed our sea patrol the Yaksha Li Lang?" "It was I," answered No-cha without hesitation. "Who are you?" asked Ao Ping. "I am No-cha, the third son of Li Ching of Ch'en-t'ang Pass," replied No-cha. "My father is the guardian of this neighbourhood, and therefore the lord of this territory. I was taking my bath here to cool myself when he came up and abused me, and so I killed him. What of it?" "Why, you rebel. Do you know that Li Lang, the Yaksha, was the leader of our sea patrol by Celestial appointment? And you dared to make away with him. I admire your audacity in admitting to this heinous crime," said Ao Ping, at the same time thrusting his halberd at No-cha. No-cha was unarmed and dodging the thrust, interposed, "Just one moment. Pray, who are you?" "I am Ao Ping, the third son of Ao Kuang, the Dragon-king of the Eastern Sea," replied Ao Ping. "I see," smiled No-cha, "So, you are the son of Ao Kuang. Listen! If you so much as breathe one more word of insult to make me angry, I'll skin you and that old mud-fish you call father." Ao Ping choked with fury. All that he could do was to retort, "You bandit! You mannerless rebel!" He attacked No-cha with his halberd. The latter hastily tossed into the air his seven-foot Chaotic Heavenly Damask, which in no time descended on Ao Ping enveloping both rider and beast.

No-cha went forward and, with one foot on Ao Ping's head, struck him on the forehead. The third prince instantly assumed his natural form of a dragon lying motionless and straight on the ground. "Now that I have made it reveal its original form, I am going to pull out its tendon for my father to use as a strap for his armour," said No-cha, extracting a tendon. The retainer was frightened out of his wits at the sight.

When No-cha reached home, the first person he met was no other than his mother, who said, "Where have you been all this afternoon, my son?" "We had a leisurely walk outside the pass and were unaware of the passage of time," answered No-cha, who went into the inner garden.

Li Ching came home from drilling his men, and, after divesting himself of his armour, sat in the inner hall, thinking of King Chou's maladministration as being responsible for the rebellion of the four hundred princes, and of the miserable plight of the people groaning under his yoke.

Let us return to Ao Kuang. He was in his Crystal Palace when the dragon soldiers returned with news of the death of the third prince at the hands of No-cha, the third son of Li Ching, commander of Ch'en-t'ang Pass. "My son was the dispenser of timely rain and as such the true god of all living things but why was he killed? Li Ching, we studied the Way together at West K'un Lun, and you and I have much in common. Yet you dared to allow your son to kill him, and then pull out his tendon," said Ao Kuang, swelling with anger at the thought that his flesh and blood should have been so cruelly treated, and that he was unable to avenge his son then and there. He transformed himself into a scholar and at once set out for Ch'en-t'ang Pass to seek vengeance.

On arrival at Li Ching's residence, he said to the guard, "Tell your commander that an old friend, Ao Kuang, would like to see him." The guard accordingly went into the hall to announce him. "It is many years since we parted. That we should meet again today is indeed a piece of good fortune," said Li Ching, saluting Ao Kuang when the latter entered the hall. Li Ching noticing his face dark with suppressed anger wondered what could be the matter. He was on the point of enquiring into the reason when Ao Kuang said in a sarcastic tone, "Brother Li, yours must be a very good son indeed." The sarcasm was not lost upon Li Ching, who replied, "My elder brother, why this unbecoming speech? I have three sons: the eldest is Chin-cha, the second Mu-cha and the youngest No-cha, all disciples of immortals of great fame. They may not have accomplished much, but they are certainly not vagabonds, as you would seem to imply. You must be mistaken in your appraisal. "No, I am not mistaken. Your youngest son, No-cha, was bathing in the river and by some magic unknown to me rocked my palace until near collapse so violent were the shocks. The Yaksha I had sent up to investigate the cause was killed, so was my third son who had his tendon pulled out," answered Ao Kuang, waxing angrier as he recounted his tale of woe, adding, "Yet you are trying to throw dust in my eyes!" Li Ching smiled, saying, "You must have made a mistake. My eldest son is on Mt. Nine Dragons studying the martial art, so is my second son on Mt. Nine Palaces while my youngest son, aged seven, does not go out of doors. How then could any one of them have perpetrated the murder?" "It was your third son, No-cha, who killed them," accused Ao Kuang. "This is all very strange but be patient. Let me fetch him out for you to question," offered Li Ching, who went into the inner hall. His wife

asked him who it was at the front hall. "It's an old friend, Ao Kuang," said Li Ching, "I don't know who killed his third son and his Yaksha, but he accuses No-cha. Tell him to come out for questioning. Where's he?" "He did go out today but how could he, only a child, have done it?" thought she but dared not venture a word, beyond saying that he was in the inner garden. Li Ching went there and located No-cha in the Cherry-apple Pavilion. No-cha related the events, maintaining it was they who had provoked the fight, and that it was in self-defence that he had had to kill them. The tendon he had pulled out of the third prince he now presented to him as a gift, not realising the implication of his confession.

When Li Ching heard the story, he stood there gaping with astonishment; not a sound could he utter for quite some time. When later he regained his power of speech, he cried, "What! You blithering idiot! Do you realise the disaster you have brought on us? You had better go out and see your uncle." "Don't worry, father," said No-cha, trying to comfort him. "Those who do not know are not guilty. If he wants the tendon back, here it is. I'll go and see him now."

Closely followed by his father, No-cha ran into the hall and, saluting Ao Kuang, said, "Uncle, your stupid nephew through ignorance committed a grave offence and craves forgiveness. I can assure you it was unintentionally done. Here is the tendon." Ao Kuang was filled with wrath at sight of it and turned to Li Ching, saying, "Now, you see who the culprit is by his own confession. Since my son was a true god, while the Yaksha Li Lang received his appointment directly from Heaven, I am going to see the Jade Emperor tomorrow and prefer murder charges against both you and your son." Whereupon he shook his sleeves and disappeared.

"This is no trifling matter," wept Li Ching aloud. Hearing the sound of weeping in the front hall, Mrs. Li enquired of a servant about the reason. He gave her the gist of the circumstances. She went with all haste to her husband's side to comfort him. As soon as Li Ching saw her, he dried his tears and said, "You have given me not a son but a destroyer of the family. Tomorrow the dragon-king will ascend to heaven and lay a complaint against us. It is only a matter of two or three days at the most before we fall under the sword." He wept afresh, and his wife turned toward No-cha and said, "I had borne you for three years and six months and gone through all manner of hardships before you were ushered into this world. Now this has to happen to us. You must be the devil incarnate to have brought this calamity on us."

No-cha was ill at ease when he saw his parents in sorrow and in tears. Kneeling before them he said, "I am no ordinary mortal and am a disciple of T'ai-I Chen-jen who gave me these treasures (indicating his Chaotic Heavenly Damask and Heaven-and-Earth Bracelet). Let Ao Kuang do what he will. He can do me no harm. I am going up to Mt. Chien-yuan to consult with my preceptor on the course of action I should take. If a man commits a wrong, he alone is responsible. There's no question of his parents being to blame." Going out of the house, he scooped up a handful of dust, and tossed it up. He leapt into the air as he did so and in the twinkling of an eye vanished from sight without a trace.

A few moments later when No-cha reached Chien-Kuang Tung on Mt. Chien-yuan, he was seeking immediate interview through an attendant who happened to be gathering firewood nearby. He was ushered without delay into the presence

of T'ai-I Chen-jen, who was surprised to see him and asked the reason of his visit. No-cha kneeling down related the whole episode, omitting nothing and asking what he should do particularly in view of the threat to the lives of his innocent parents. "True," thought Tai-I Chen-jen, "No-cha through his ignorance killed Ao Ping by mistake, but he was destined to die at the hands of No-cha. Surely, Ao Kuang, the king of all dragons and the dispenser of timely rain, must know it. It is a very small matter. Why must he lay a plaint in the Celestial Court?" Aloud he said to No-cha, "Take off your coat." With a finger he "wrote" a charm on his chest and then whispered in his ear instructions as to what he should do when he got to Pao-te Men. "Now," he added, "Return to Ch'en-t'ang Kuan and tell your parents that in the event of any trouble arising, there is still your teacher."

No-cha left Mt. Chien-yuen and headed straight for Pao-te Men. There, where the sun never set, the scenery enveloped in violet mists and red clouds under a clear blue sky was beautiful beyond words and entirely different to its earthly counterpart. No-cha soon arrived but could not see Ao Kuang while the doors of the Celestial Court were still closed. He was standing waiting patiently at the gate where the immortals assembled when he espied Ao Kuang in court dress approaching the Southern Gate of Heaven. Ao Kuang soliloquized, "It must still be early." No-cha was invisible to Ao Kuang but could see him. The sight of Ao Kuang filled him with rage and with his Heaven-and-Earth Bracelet felled Ao Kuang with a mighty blow. Ao Kuang fell prone to the ground, knocked out of consciousness, and No-cha put one foot on his back.

When he came to, he turned his head to see who it was that had knocked him down. No-cha revealed himself. He at once recognized No-cha and began to revile him. "You vile callow-cheeked murderer who still smells of his mother's milk! You killed my Yaksha and my son whose tendon you extracted. Now, you have the temerity to push me down and stand on my back after hitting me! You and your parents will pay for this insult!" Stung to the quick by this, to him, unjust accusation, No-cha would have made short work of him had he not remembered T'ai-I Chen-jen's orders not to take his life. "Go on scream. That will give me a chance to kill you. Listen, you old mud-fish! I am none other than Ling-chu-tzu (Intelligent Pearl), disciple of T'ai-I Chen-jen of Chin-kuang Tung on Mt. Chien-yuan. I was bathing by the river when first your Yaksha and then your son came up and insulted me. Naturally, I lost my temper and killed them both, as anyone else in my place would have done. Why, I could kill you as easily, too, you worm," said No-cha. "You are nothing but a miserable coward," retorted Ao Kuang, "To think you have the guts to touch me!" "I see," said No-cha, "You are stubborn, aren't you? You won't be afraid of me, if I don't give you an example of what will be in store for you, if you don't control that tongue of yours." So, after pummeling him ten to twenty times, he ripped off a part of Ao Kuang's ceremonial robe to expose one side of his scaly body. Then he extracted in rapid succession forty to fifty scales, and bloodstreamed down where Ao Kuang was lying face downward, his back still under No-cha's foot, firm and unsympathetic as a rock. He was writhing in excruciating agony and screaming for all he was worth. He tried in vain to wriggle free. The pain was so unbearable that he cried for mercy. Only then did No-cha stay his hand. "Now this is only a sample of what you will taste if you do not give up the idea of prosecuting me and my parents," he said, "Follow me to Ch'en-t'ang Pass. Refuse and I'll finish you off with my Heaven-and-Earth Bracelet. Since I've the backing of T'ai-

"I Chen-jen, I'm not afraid of you." Ao Kuang had met his Nemesis in No-cha and could only fall in with his wishes. He rose to his feet at No-cha's bidding. "I have heard that dragons can change their size and shape at will," said No-cha, "As it would be inconvenient for me to carry you as you are to Ch'en-t'ang Pass, change yourself into a small snake." As it was impossible for Ao Kuang to escape, he accordingly transformed himself into a small green snake. No-cha picked it up and, putting it into his sleeve, left Pao-tê-mên.

In a jiffy No-cha reached home, and told his father he had by persuasion obtained Ao Kuang's consent to drop charges. Li Ching could not believe his ears, and said angrily, "You're talking through your hat. Don't try to deceive me." "Father," replied No-cha, "Don't be angry. Uncle will confirm me." "But where's your uncle?" asked Li Ching. "Here he is," said No-cha, taking out a small green snake from his sleeve and throwing it on to the floor. Ao Kuang at once resumed human form. Li Ching was taken aback but asked, "What's happened to you, elder brother?" An extremely angry Ao Kuang narrated the events at the South Gate of Heaven, at the same time baring his shoulder to show Li Ching the ugly wound caused by No-cha drawing out the scales. "This ferocious son of yours will no doubt get his deserts," continued Ao Kuang, "I will get the other three dragon-kings and together we'll ascend to the Celestial Court and charge you and him with murder, physical violence and bodily harm. See if you can get out of it this time." Then he vanished.

Li Ching observed that matters were getting from bad to worse, and wondered how he or No-cha could extricate themselves from the unenviable position in which they found themselves. Kneeling before his father, No-cha said, "Don't worry. My preceptor tells me that no ordinary mortal I am destined to protect the new sovereign. Not even the four dragon kings can do me harm. If anything really serious should happen, he will take care of it." His mother, seeing him kneeling before his father who was obviously not too pleased with him, feared that something unpleasant might ensue from this discussion. So she interposed, "You're still here? Why don't you go into the inner garden and leave your father alone?" No-cha understood and withdrew into the inner garden. He made his way to the fortress.

To be continued