

The Kind Monk

Biography of Venerable Master Hsuan Hua
for Young Readers



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Adapted from Records of the Life of Venerable Hsuan Hua, 1981 and

In Memory of the First Anniversary of the Nirvana of Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, 1996

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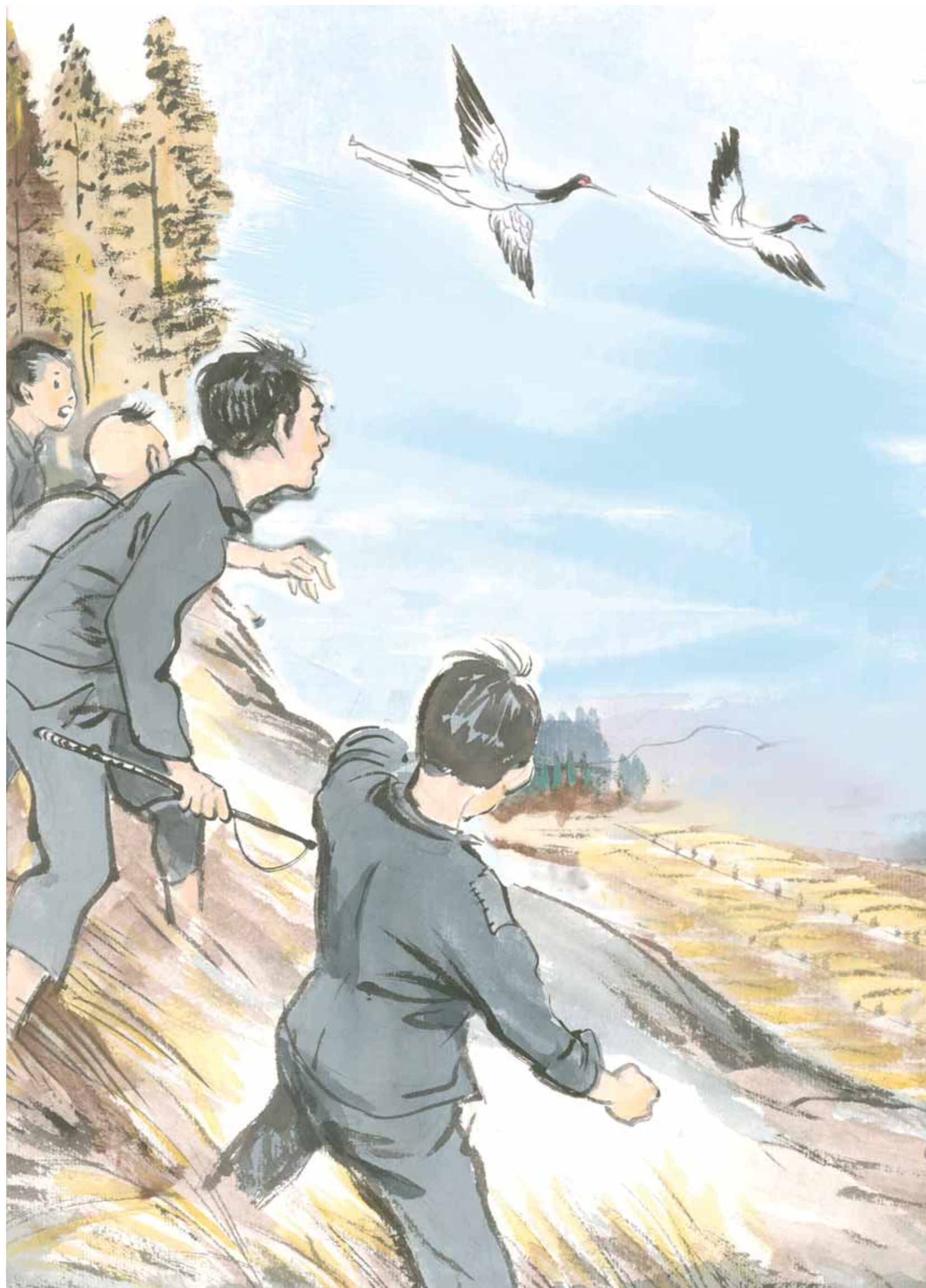


Introduction by Terri Nicholson

From my very first days studying with the Master I could clearly see his joy in working with children of every age. As soon as they could crawl they were drawn like iron filings to a magnet. When the Master lectured they would climb up to the high seat where he sat, and he, as often as not, would stop and take the time to teach even these little ones. Later he worked hard to establish schools for them and I had the privilege of learning to be a teacher, guided by his great wisdom. Still later I had my own children and delighted in the teachings both parents and children were given.

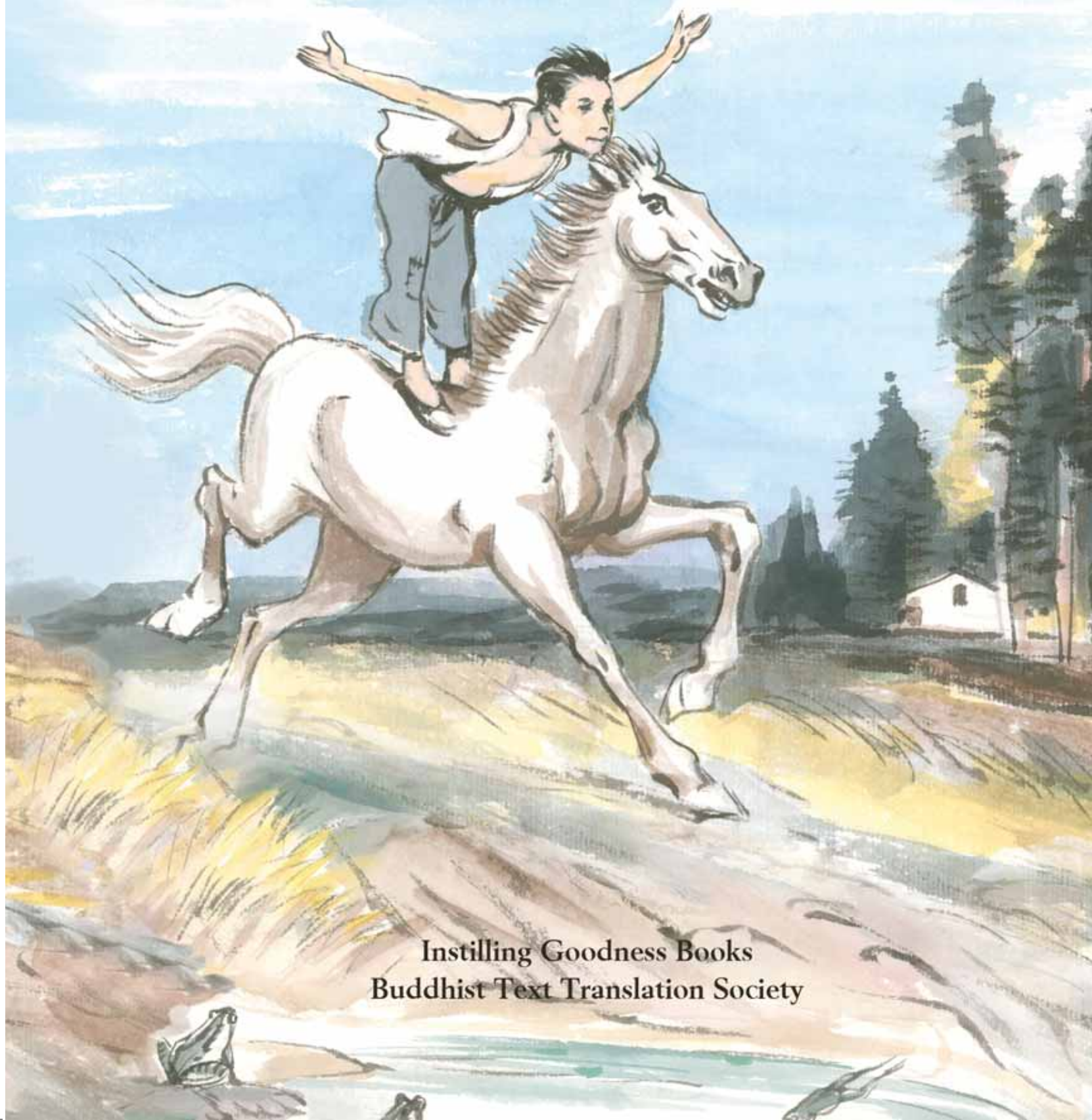
One of the most powerful teachings for me was that we all have the potential to attain great wisdom and become Buddhas. It is easy to feel that those with such wisdom are forever beyond us, somehow different in nature than we ordinary human beings. What better way to inspire children than to hear and read stories of the Master's own childhood. If even the Venerable Master was once a child who got into mischief and lost his temper, then maybe we also, naughty as we may be now, have the potential for greatness.

The simple, accessible manner in which the stories are told does not detract from their power to inspire, and the illustrations add to the richness of their telling. I believe this new volume of stories of the life of a "kind monk" will appeal to children, young and old, and to those of us grown-ups who love a good story, as well. I hope it is only the first of many volumes.



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Buddhist Text Translation Society

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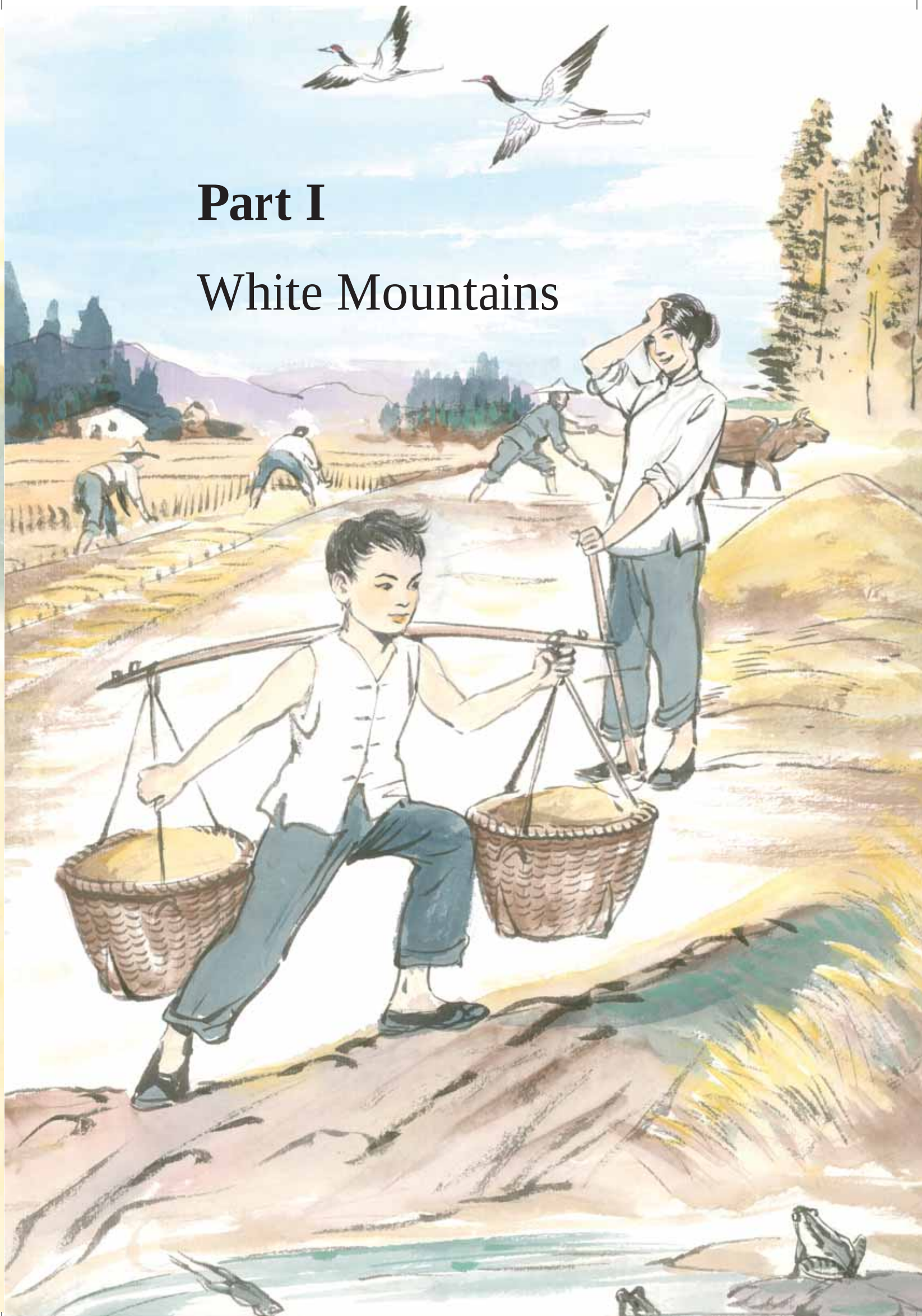
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Part I

White Mountains







World Of Wonders

~March 16, 1918, the year of the horse~

Rain falls at the right time and the harvest is the best ever.

The winter wind blows cold and hard around the small hut. Inside a new baby lies safe and warm in his mother's arms. His body is the color of gold, and his eyes are as bright as the moon. The happy father says, "My wish for another son has come true."

"I had a strange dream last night," says the mother. "I saw Amitabha Buddha radiating rays of golden light into the world. When I awoke and the baby was born, a wonderful fragrance filled the air. Our son must be special."

The baby does not stop crying. "Hush, my pearl, my jade," says the mother. But he cries on for three days and nights. When he finally stops, everyone is so tired that they sleep for a whole day and night. His grandmother names him Yu Shu, which means jade book.

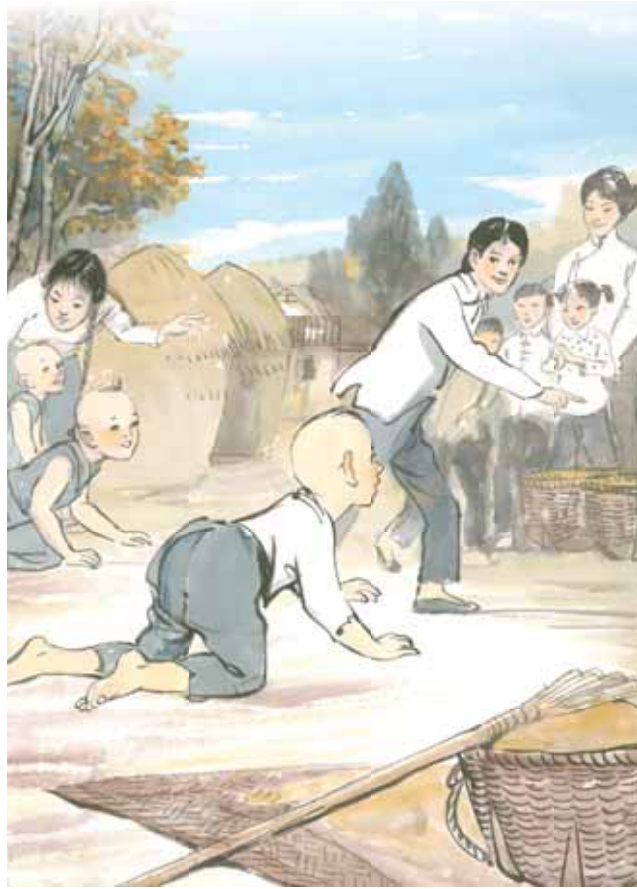
Winter turns into spring. Yu Shu watches his father and brothers plow the fields. He hears his sisters sing at the well. He smells dumplings steaming in the kitchen and laughs at the sound of his mother chopping vegetables. Chop, chop, chop! Daisies pop up from the earth. Baby cranes hatch. His world is filled with wonders.

His father is a poor farmer named Bai, and his mother's name is Hu. He has five brothers and three sisters. His mother is Buddhist and a vegetarian. He follows in her footsteps and is also vegetarian all his life.

The Bais live near a small village on Pine Flower River. In the winter the river freezes solid, but in the summer Yu Shu can see smooth multicolored stones at the bottom. On the sides of the river, fields of wheat, barley, and sorghum stretch out like great seas to the Chang Bai mountains, always white with snow.

Everyone for miles around knows Yu Shu's mother as a kind Buddhist. Even the animals benefit from her kindness, for she is a vegetarian and never harms them. Yu Shu follows in her footsteps and is also vegetarian all his life.





A Fast Crawler

Nothing gives the Bais more pleasure than watching their bright-eyed little boy. They fuss over him until he is spoiled rotten. If he cannot get his way, he cries and won't eat until his parents' hearts soften and they give in. Gradually, he gets so he won't talk, and he won't play with the other kids either. He only glares at them.

"What a stubborn child!" the neighbors say. His mother smiles and continues to watch.

Yu Shu is a fast crawler, so his brothers set him up in a crawling race with other babies. The whistle blows and Yu Shu zips past the others. "Wait for me!" cries a baby and opens his mouth wide. "Chomp!" He bites Yu Shu on the heel.

"Wa-a-ah!" yells Yu Shu and just sits there on the ground.

"Bite him back!" says his second-born brother. "Fight for yourself."

"I don't know how to fight!" Yu Shu cries.

Tweaking him on the nose, his second-born brother replies, "Don't worry, I'll teach you gung fu when you get big enough." And to the dismay of his parents, he does.

In the spring, when Chinese New Year comes, the Bai family celebrates with the rest of the village. Hundreds of red lanterns are hung. Acrobats and opera singers put on shows in the streets. Fire-crackers pop! Yu Shu's head swivels from side to side. He doesn't know where to look first.

Beng-beng-beng! go the cymbals and gongs. It is time for the lion dance. Yu Shu jumps for joy. The lion cocks its ears and leaps high in the air, teasing the big-headed clowns. It twirls around and flips its tail. Yu Shu is sad when the day is over and can hardly wait until next year.

Planting Barley

“Wake up, my youngest son,” his mother calls. “Today is special.”

It isn't quite dawn. Yu Shu stretches and rubs his eyes. He is tall for a boy of seven. “It's not daylight,” he says, yawning.

“There are certain things a young boy must do,” says his mother. “Today you will learn to plant barley.”

“Hooray!” he cries and jumps out of bed.

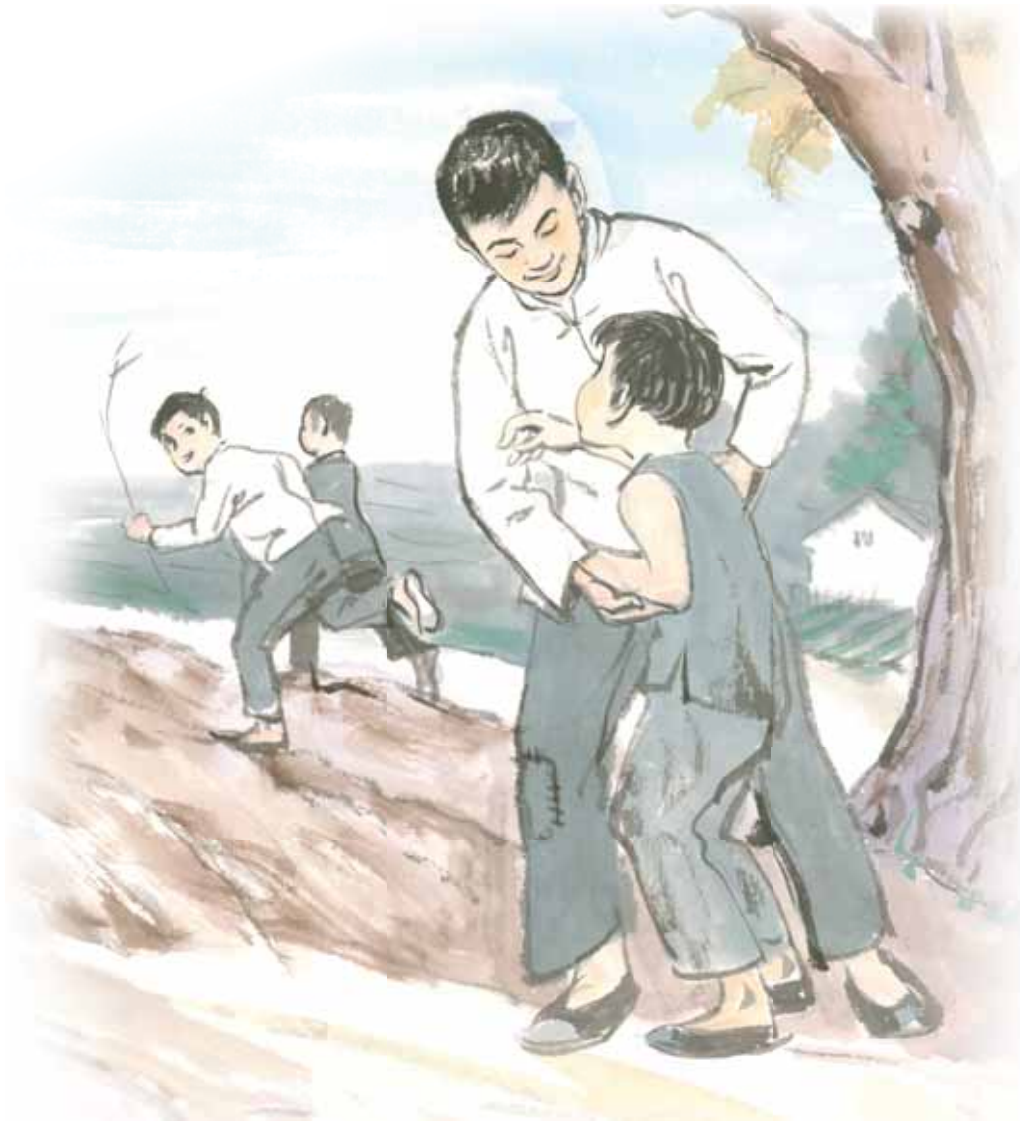
Trotting behind his father, he scatters seeds along the rows. Insects buzz and fly, humming in the yellow sun. The sweet smell of the rich, brown earth makes him happy. Drinking in the fresh air, he says, “Honorable Father, when I grow up, I want to be a farmer like you.”

“*Hao ba!* Very well,” says his father. “But I warn you, your miserable old father is hard to please. A son of mine must work hard and not cry. And he should play with other kids, eh?” Yu Shu stops the crying and puts himself to work.

Work on the farm is hard. Up before dawn, he zigzags back and forth to the well, carrying buckets of water for his mother, as she lovingly waters the young cabbages.

In the autumn the dandelions turn to fluff and the yellow grain ripens. Yu Shu helps his brothers to harvest and hoist the grain up to the rooftops to dry. It glitters like gold coins in the sunlight. He also shoos the birds away—for this is the work of farm children in China.





King of the Village

Playing is another matter. Yu Shu doesn't know how to play. He only knows how to boss. He sets himself up as king of the village. "I'm the king, follow me!" he commands, as he dashes into an abandoned wheat field, waving a stick in the air. A group of wide-eyed children scamper behind.

He orders them to pile up a mound of dirt, and then he sits on top. Anxious little faces look up at him. "This is my throne," he says. "Bow to me and do as I say."

"Long live the king!" cry the children, bumping their heads on the ground. They are afraid of Yu Shu, because he is big and strong and would be hard to fight.

When it comes to fighting, Yu Shu is fearless. He fights like a whirlwind, challenging the biggest and toughest boys in the village. But he doesn't fight for fame or glory, but to protect kids from bullies. He has no heart for cruelty. When the bullies see him coming, they cry, "Here comes Yu Shu!" Not wishing to risk a black eye or a bloody nose, they run away.

His second-born brother says, "Our youngest brother is the best gung fu fighter in the whole village. No one can match his skill. I taught him well."

His mother worries. "Please stop fighting," she begs her son. "I'm afraid you'll be killed!" "It would be an honor to die fighting for a friend," Yu Shu says, washing a bloody fist.

The Wild Horse

To give his parents even more worry, Yu Shu rides horses—the wilder the better. His neighbor has a new horse that has never been ridden. It is a beautiful white stallion with a golden mane. After work, Yu Shu joins the other farm boys to see who will be the first to break it.

One by one, each boy takes his turn. And one by one, the horse throws them off like hot coals. Yu Shu stands by, watching. “Let me ride.”

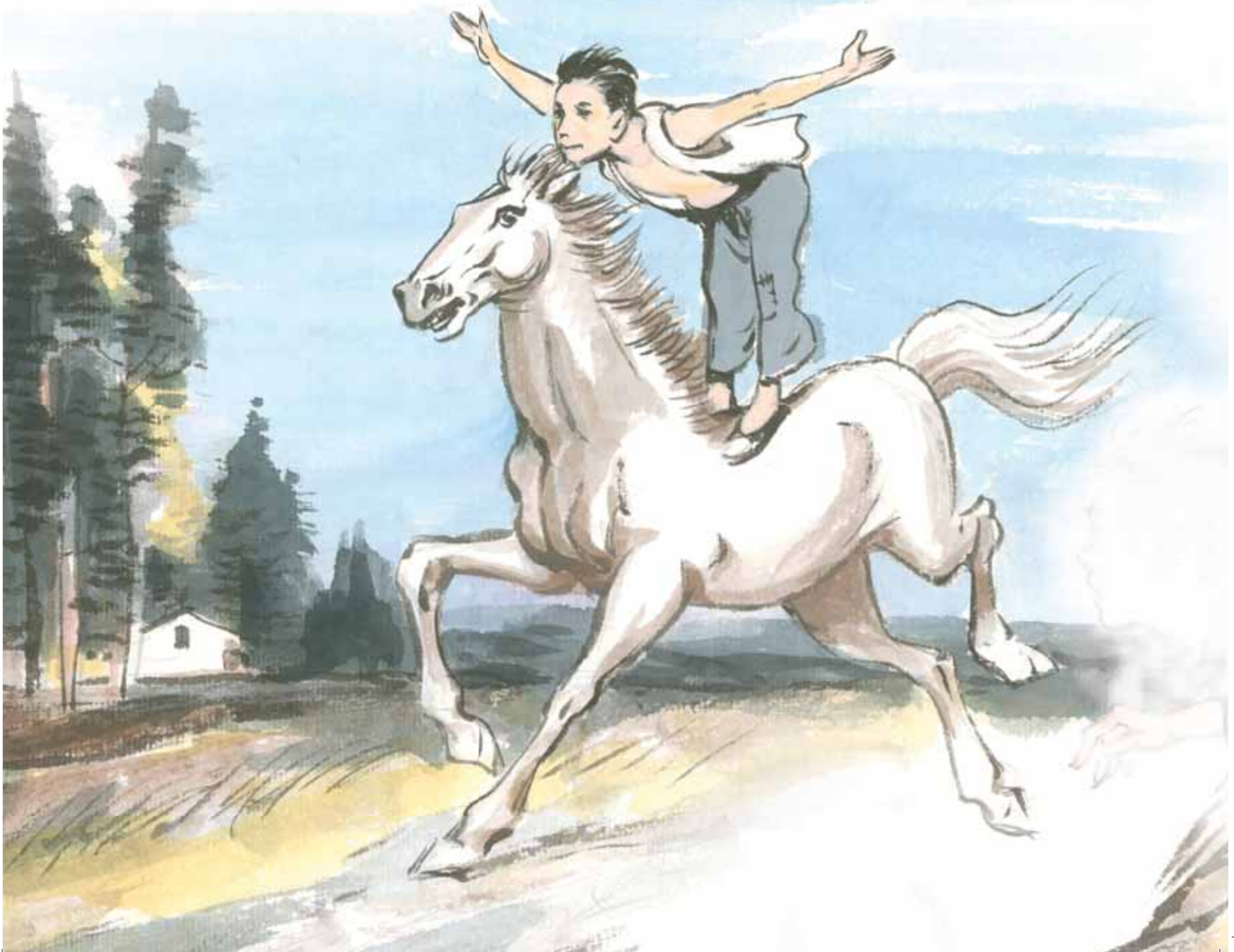
“You’ll need this,” says the neighbor, handing him a whip.

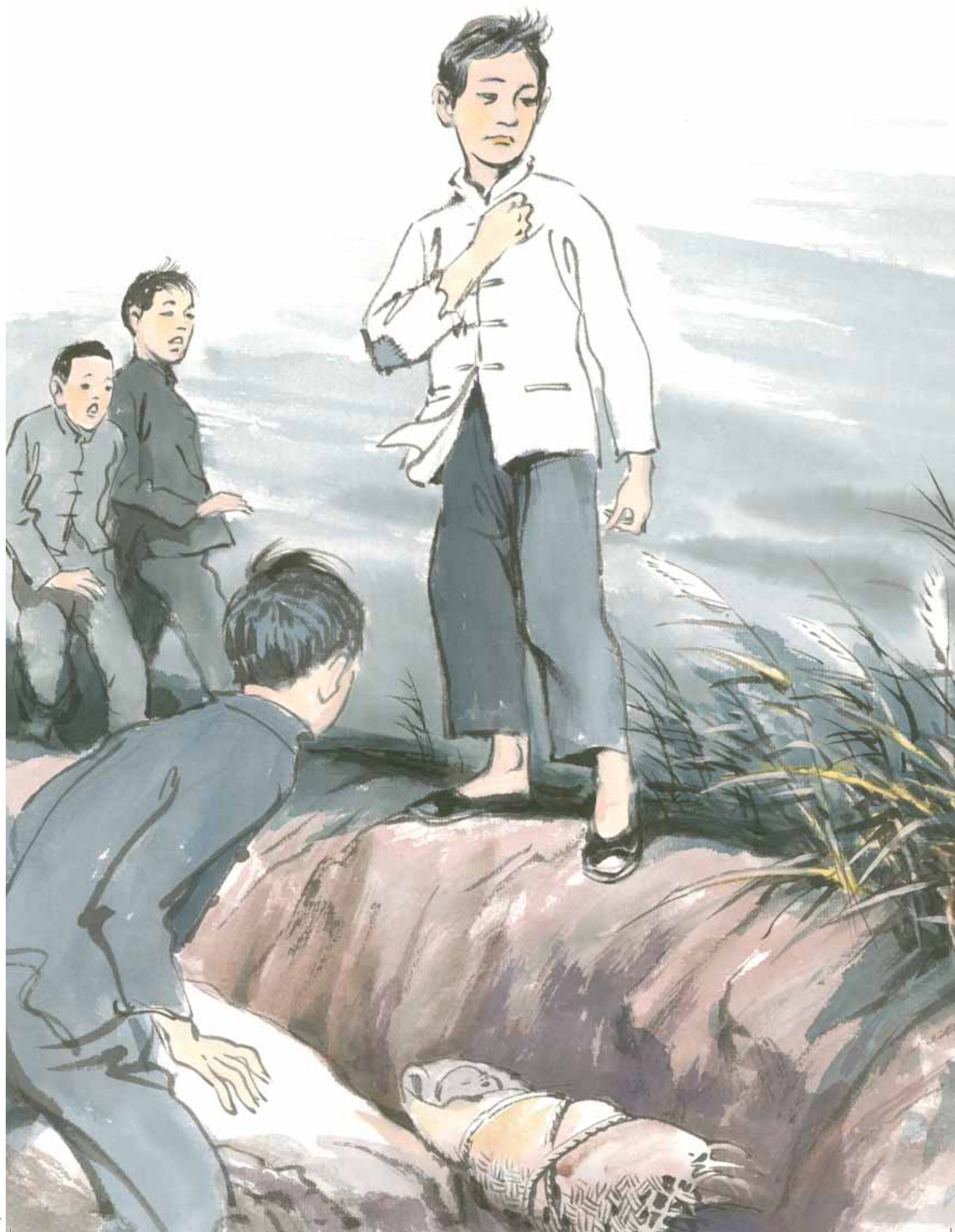
“No, I won’t.”

Walking slowly up to the horse, he clucks softly and runs his hand along its belly. The horse snorts and stands perfectly still. Twisting his fingers in its long mane, Yu Shu swings onto its back, now wet with sweat.

The wild bucking that everyone is waiting for never comes. Yu Shu eases the horse into a slow walk and out into the pasture. Soon they are galloping at full speed. To everyone’s surprise, he stands up on the horse’s back and spreads his arms out like wings. The crowd cheers and hoots!

Reining in the horse, Yu Shu slides off its back. “I was just having fun,” he says, handing the reins to the owner. “This is a fine horse. Treat him well and don’t use a whip on him.”







What is Death?

One day Yu Shu is playing with his playmates in an abandoned wheat field. They come upon a baby wrapped in straw. “Come and play with us,” Yu Shu calls to the baby. “I’m the king.” Though he is eleven years old, he has never seen a dead person. He thinks the baby is asleep. “Open your eyes,” he says, tapping it on the shoulder. The baby doesn’t move. Yu Shu jumps back.

“It’s dead! It can’t hear you,” says a playmate.

With tears streaking down his face, Yu Shu runs home as fast as he can. Bursting into the house, he finds his mother. Out of breath, he gasps. “Will I die?”

“Everyone dies,” she says. “Some people die of old age and sickness. Some have accidents. When babies die, it is the custom to wrap them in straw and leave them in the fields.”

“What’s the meaning of life, if people are just born and die?” he asks.

His uncle says, “If you wish to understand, you must become a Buddhist monk and study the teachings of the Buddha.”

Yu Shu’s eyes brighten. “Then I must become a monk!”

“I approve of your wish,” says his mother, a smile softening her tired old face. “But I have little work left in me. Stay and take care of your old mother. After I die, you may do as you wish.”

From that time on, Yu Shu serves his parents with all his heart and strength. Nothing makes him happier. The neighbors call him Good Son Bai.





Bowing to his Parents

When Yu Shu is twelve years old, his mother says, “I have a present for you, a statue of Amitabha Buddha.” It is made of white porcelain and wears a red robe.

“It’s beautiful,” whispers Yu Shu as he places it on the altar. “The robe is the color of the sunset on Pine Flower River.”

Bowing in respect to Amitabha, he feels a strange feeling stir inside his chest. He can’t explain the feeling, but he realizes that everything he did in the past was wrong—the temper tantrums, the fighting, worrying his parents. “I no longer want to fight and have my playmates bow to me,” he says. “I want to bow to others, even bullies.”

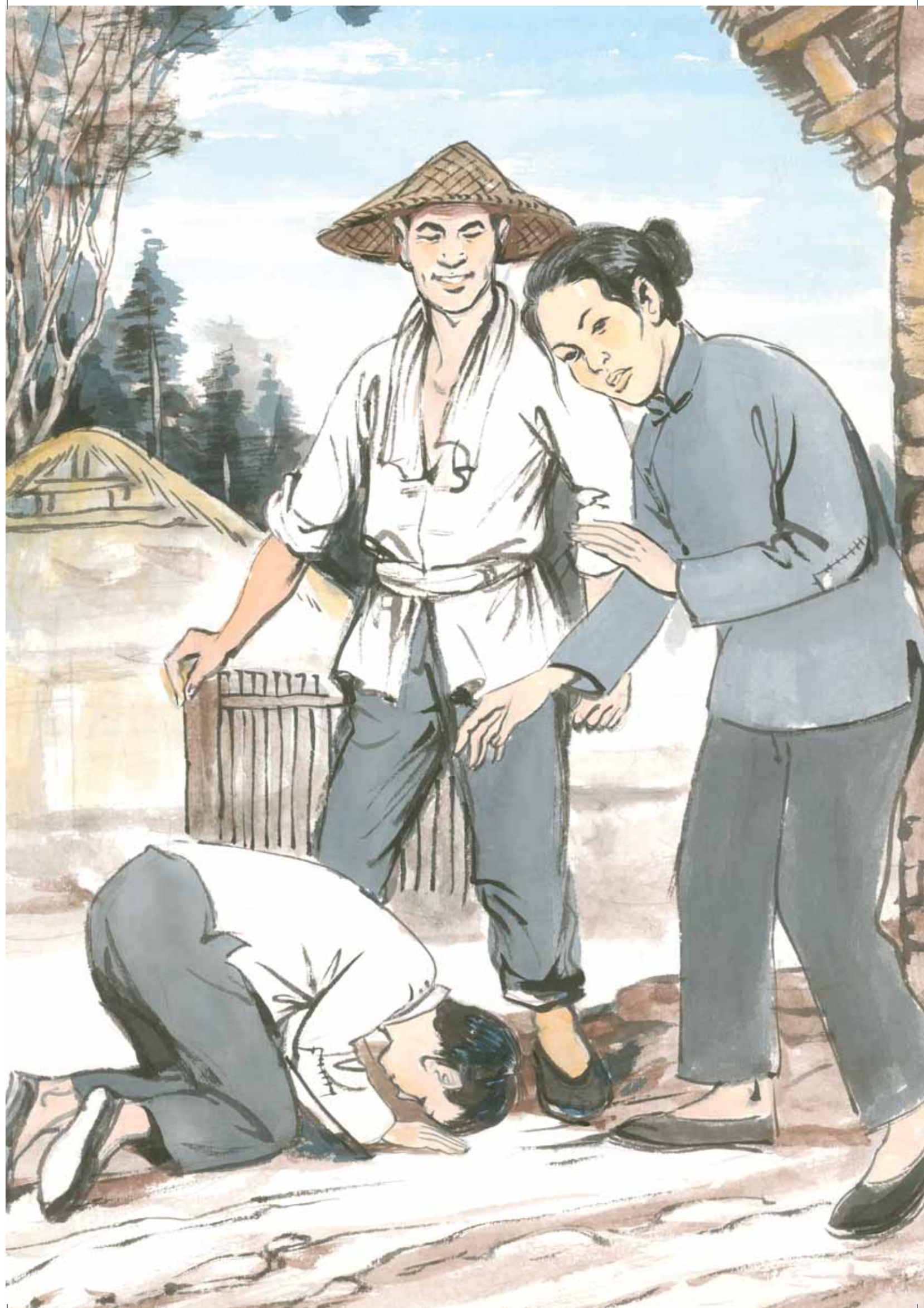
First he bows to his parents. “Why are you bowing to us?” they ask. “It’s not New Year’s Day.” Chinese children bow to their parents on New Year’s Day to repay their kindness.

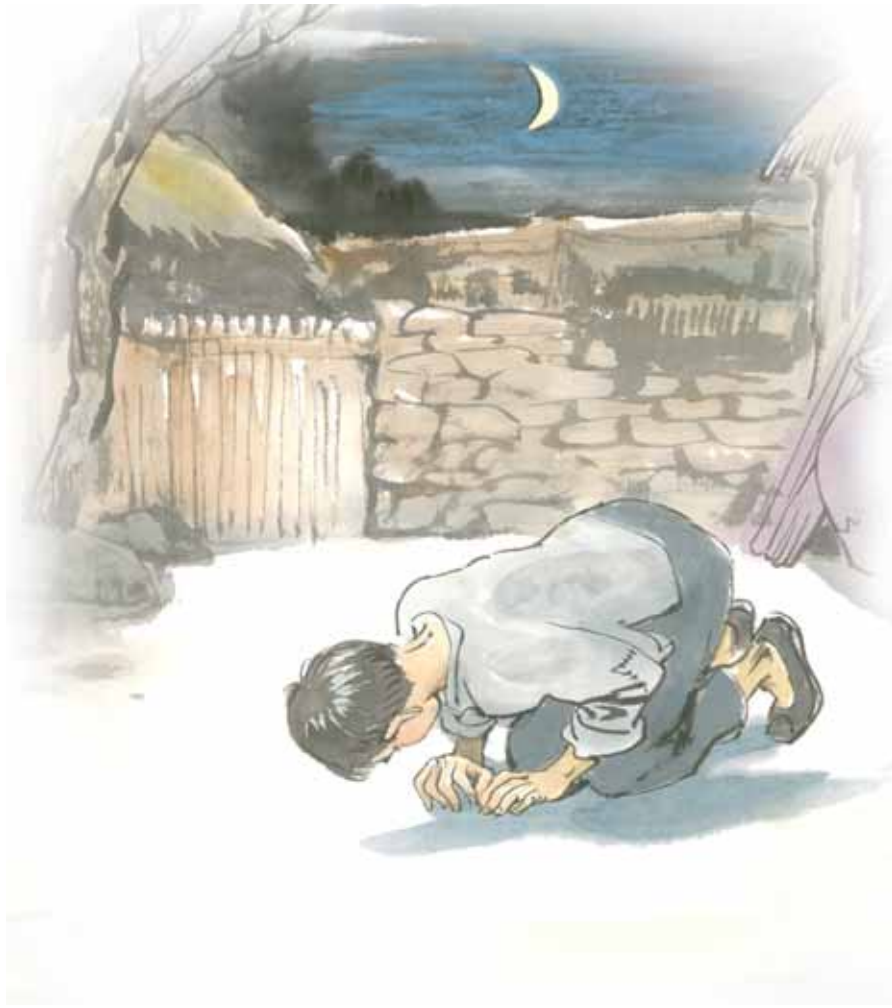
“Honorable Father and Mother, I’ve been a good-for-nothing son,” Yu Shu says, lowering his eyes in respect. “I want to make it up to you.”

“But you don’t have to bow,” says his father, with tears in his eyes. Just listen and do what you are told.” But Yu Shu bows to them anyway.

Early in the morning and late at night, when everyone is asleep, he bows in the courtyard. Then he has a thought. *The world is bigger than my parents. I will bow to the heavens, to the earth, and to the emperor. And to good people and even to bad people, that they become good. I’ll bow to my mosquito friends too.* With each bow, he tells himself, “I am the worst of all. I need to change my own faults.”

Soon he is bowing 837 times in the morning and 837 times at night, rain or snow. At first, his parents do not like it, but gradually they are pleased to see their son changing his bad habits and growing kind and gentle.





A Mysterious Dream

When Yu Shu is twelve years old, he has a strange dream. He is walking down a moonlit road when all of a sudden, the ground fills up with huge, dark holes. He crawls around the holes, one by one, careful to not slip. Hot air swirls around him, making him dizzy. The holes grow bigger and bigger. Suddenly, he loses his footing and topples over. “Aiihhh!”

Just then, he feels someone grab his arm and pull him up. An old woman wearing a ragged robe smiles down at him. On her feet are yellow sandals, and in her hand a bamboo pole. The moon dances in her eyes. She leads him out into open country where the path is flat and smooth, and tiny flowers grow in the springy green grass.

Hearing voices behind him, he brushes aside his tears and looks back. Oh, what a surprise! Following him is a throng of people—yellow, red, brown, black and white. Some wear robes. Others wear flowers and feathers, plaids and stripes, and blue jeans. They call to him in different languages. Their voices make his heart sing. “Who are they?” he asks. “Why are they following me?”

“To escape the dangerous path,” says the old woman. “You must guide them well.”

“But I don’t understand,” he says.

“You will,” she says, and singing, melts away into the moon.

The voices stay with him as he awakens to the golden morning sun. His heart floods with loving kindness and flows out to all the people and creatures in the world. He never forgets the dream.

Good Man Pan

Yu Shu knocks on the door. The doctor lifts the bar and peers at him standing there in the cold, dark night. Swirling snow drifts in. “What do you want?” he asks.

Yu Shu bows his head low. “Are you Good Man Pan, the doctor who helps the poor?”

“Some people call me that,” answers Good Man Pan. “May I help you?”

“Yes, my mother is sick, she can’t move,” he says, hugging his ragged coat tightly around his shoulders.

“Where do you live?” asks Good Man Pan.

“Above the bend on Pine Flower River,” he answers.

“That’s a long way. Did you walk all the way here in this snow storm?”

“Yes, I’ll do anything to make my mother well.”

“Well, come in and get warm,” says Good Man Pan, smiling. “Sleep here tonight, and we’ll drive the cart to your place early in the morning.”

The next morning Yu Shu watches Good Man Pan rub his mother’s legs with an herbal salve. “These herbs will help her walk again,” Good Man Pan says.

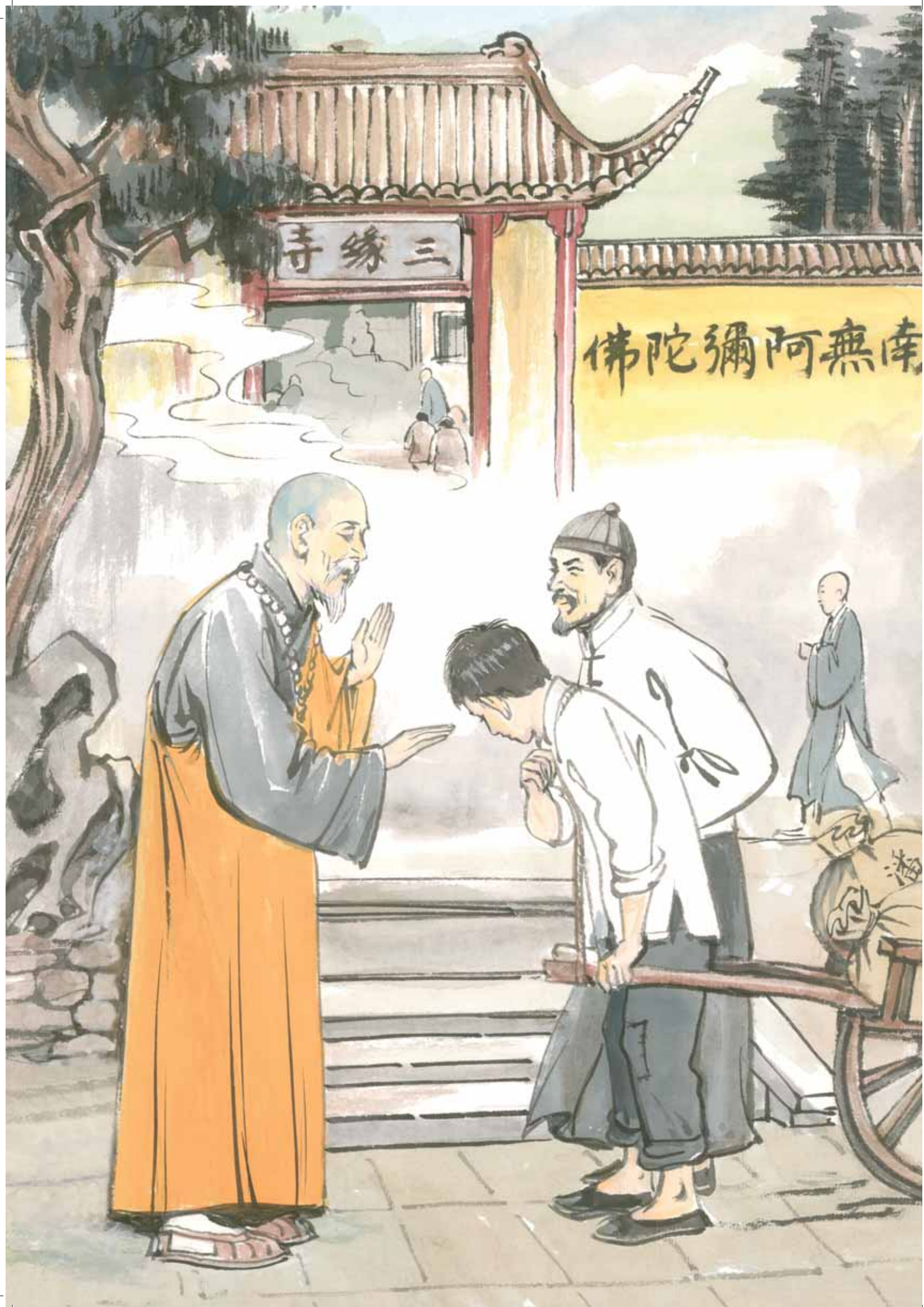
“I don’t have any money, but I can work to pay you,” he says.

“There’s no charge,” says Good Man Pan, looking into the youth’s kind face and intelligent eyes. “But I’ll teach you medicine, if you want to learn. I could use a good helper.”

Yu Shu’s father stands in the doorway, rolling his cap in his hands, “That’s a fine offer,” he says. “Doctors make good money.”

To please his father, Yu Shu studies medicine and helps many people. In the end, he decides not to be a doctor. “If someone were to die,” he says, “I could not face myself.”





Old Master

Yu Shu wants to become a Buddhist. First, he must find a wise spiritual teacher to give him refuge in the Three Jewels—the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Buddhas are enlightened ones. The Dharma is the teachings of the Buddhas. The Sangha is the monks and nuns who teach the Dharma. To take refuge means to take an oath to become a Buddhist.

When he isn't busy on the farm, Yu Shu walks from temple to temple, asking questions of the monks, looking for the right teacher. His teacher must have a good heart. He must be honest, kind, and true.

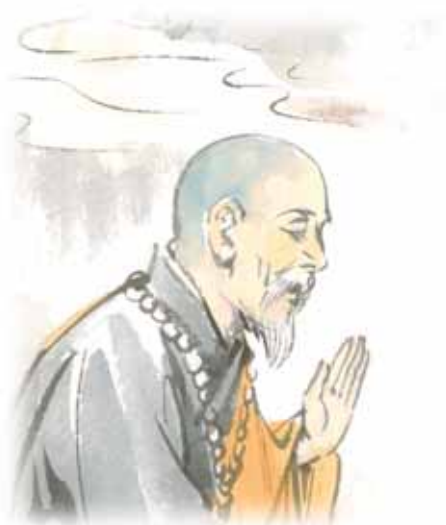
Three years pass before Yu Shu meets Old Master. Every year Good Man Pan offers a cart of rice to the monks at San Yuan Monastery near the city of Harbin. This year he asks Yu Shu to help him. When they are unloading the gift of rice, Old Master Chang Zhi (Chung Jer) greets them. “*Ching jin! Ching jin!* Come in. Come in. Join me for tea.” His eyes are as deep as the sea.

As Yu Shu bows, a slight shiver runs across his shoulders and down his back. *How strange, he thinks. He can see right into my heart. Can this be my teacher?* Lowering his eyes in respect, he asks, “Old Master, will you take me as your disciple and teach me the way of the Buddha?”

Old Master's eyes twinkle merrily. He rubs Yu Shu on the head and says, “Be patient. Don't be greedy. Work hard.” The sleeves of his robe are thin and tattered.

Having found his teacher, Yu Shu takes refuge with him. He also takes the Five Precepts—no killing, no stealing, no lying, no impure conduct, and no intoxicants. These precepts, he keeps all his life. Precepts are codes of behavior.

From then on, no matter how far apart they are, Old Master knows what Yu Shu is thinking, and Yu Shu knows what Old Master is thinking.





Who's Afraid of Demons?

Old Master teaches Yu Shu how to sit in meditation. At first, Yu Shu's legs hurt. His back aches and his mind jumps around like a monkey. With practice, he learns to relax his body and to calm his mind. Now he can sit for hours. "My power is so great!" he boasts one day. "I'm not afraid of anything, not even demons. They're afraid of me."

That night he drops off into an uneasy sleep filled with frightening faces and howling and crawling things. Dark shapes crowd around him. "Let's pull out his tongue!" they scream. "No, let's strangle him!" And they grab at his throat with their cold, wet fingers.

His throat burns like fire. *Aiihhh!* he thinks. *The demons of sickness have found me. I should not have boasted.* For days and nights, the demons argue over him. He lies there in blackness. No day. No night. No sounds. *Am I dead?* he wonders.

Then one day soft strong arms encircle him and he catches the voices of three men, saying, "We're going to take you out to play." The creeping horrors scream in panic and crawl back into their corners. The men lift Yu Shu from his bed, up through the ceiling, and up into the swirling clouds.

They glide over the vast land of China, visiting beautiful temples on high mountain peaks and emerald islands in the sea. Yu Shu holds on tightly. *Oh, how thrilling it is to be flying through the air like a bird, with the wind rushing by my face!* Across the great ocean they fly to a faraway land with skyscrapers, subways, and a golden-colored bridge.

There he meets people with blond hair and blue eyes, the color of the sky. They take him to a valley with a gold-colored mountain gate, where peacocks strut across the lawns and deer graze under giant redwood trees. And everywhere he goes, people cherish and honor him.

Like a dying wind, the lands and people fade away, and the three men return him home. Looking down from the ceiling, he sees himself lying in bed. *How can this be? Are there two of me?* A bird sings from the window sill, and he snaps awake. *Ah, now I'm one.*

Opening his eyes, he looks into the faces of his mother and father. The room feels warm and cozy. "He's alive!" his parents cry, happily. "He's not dead after all!" Yu Shu never brags again.





School at Sixteen

Good Man Pan has a son who becomes Yu Shu's best friend. One night they are playing flute by the river, to the croaking of frogs. Young Pan says, "My father wants me to go to school. He'll pay if you'll go with me."

Yu Shu crinkles up his nose, the way he does when he is happy. "There's nothing I'd like better," he says, clicking his heels high in the air. For years he has dreamed of going to school, but school costs a great deal in China—more than a poor farmer like his father can pay.

His heart races with excitement as he takes his seat on the first day. The classroom is filled with the sing-song voices of students reciting their lessons together. They sit on a *kang*, a long brick bed kept warm by a fire built underneath.

Sitting on the front of the *kang* is the school master, a tall, haughty looking man with eyes as sharp as needles. He holds a long pointing stick. Yu Shu's eyes widen. "If I make a mistake, will the teacher bop me over the head with his big stick?" he asks Young Pan.

That night Yu Shu studies his lessons until he knows them by heart. The next day when it is his turn to recite, his mind goes blank. He cannot remember the first word.

"Kneel until class is over!" yells the teacher, pointing his stick at him. Yu Shu slides off the *kang* and sinks to his knees on the hard brick floor. Silence fills the room.

It is the same every day until he figures it out. "Fear is my problem. But what's there to be afraid of? If I'm in for a beating, so be it!"

From that day on, he pays no attention to the big stick. He learns his lessons quickly and never forgets them.

"What's your secret?" his classmates ask him.

"I study on the road, on the pillow, and even on the toilet," he says. "That way, I don't waste my time."

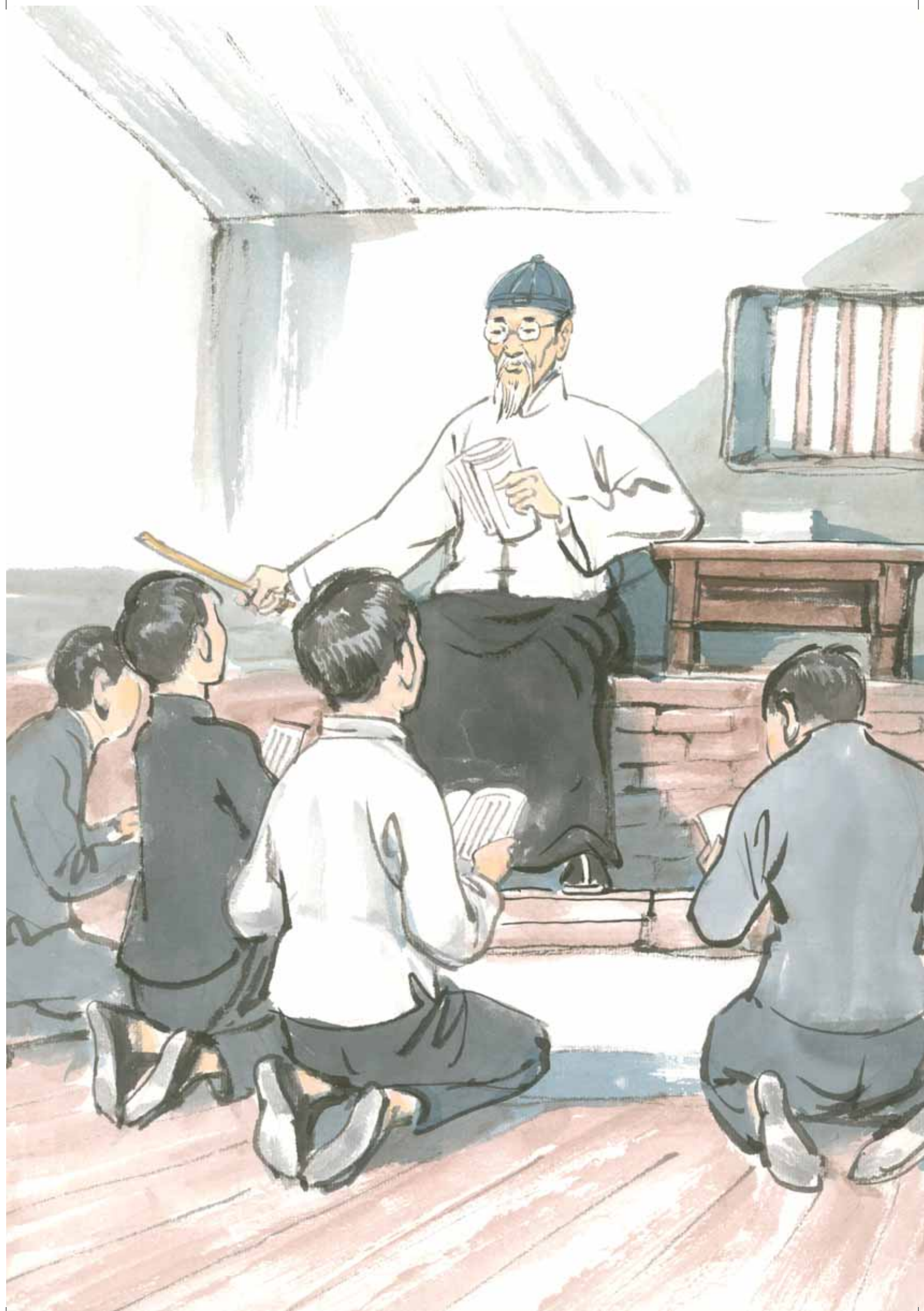
Now that he can read, he reads the *sutras*, the sacred books of the Buddha's teachings. They spark a light within his heart, and he studies them day and night. Sometimes, he forgets to eat and sleep.

Since most people in his village cannot read, he explains the *sutras* in the village temple. Using simple words, he explains the deep meanings in ways that make sense to everyone. "I don't speak well," he says. "But if I don't teach you, you'll never learn true Buddhism."

He tells Young Pan, "The Buddha's teachings are wonderful. I'm going to translate them into all the languages in the world. That way, everyone can have wisdom like the sea."

"How can you? You only speak Chinese."

"That won't stop me!"



Toad Hall

At the age of eighteen, Yu Shu leaves school to help his aging parents on the farm. One summer, late in the afternoon, he is sitting with them on the front porch. They are braiding straw into sandals. Some poor children come by leading an ox home from the fields. A green horsefly buzzes around the ox's ear. Watching them, Yu Shu has an idea. "I am going to start a free school so the poor farm children can be educated. Right here in the house."

"Fine," says his mother. "Only it will be crowded, with all the relatives living here."

"You could get a job teaching in the private school," says his father, twisting a piece of straw into a strap. "And make good money."

"I don't want to teach for money," says Yu Shu, slipping on his new sandals. "I just want to help people."

"Still stubborn," his father says, chuckling to himself. "If anyone could start a free school, it would be you."

It's a hot summer and there is plenty of work to do. Young Pan helps Yu Shu make desks and a blackboard. Good Man Pan buys paper, brushes, and ink for each student.

September comes and with it school. After working in the fields all day, long-legged children of all ages run down the zigzag path that leads from the village to the new school. The zigzag path keeps the good luck from flowing out of the village.

Holding their ink-filled brushes, the children copy the characters that their teacher carefully writes on the blackboard. Day after day, he bends over their desks, guiding them with every stroke. He teaches them everything he knows and never takes a cent.

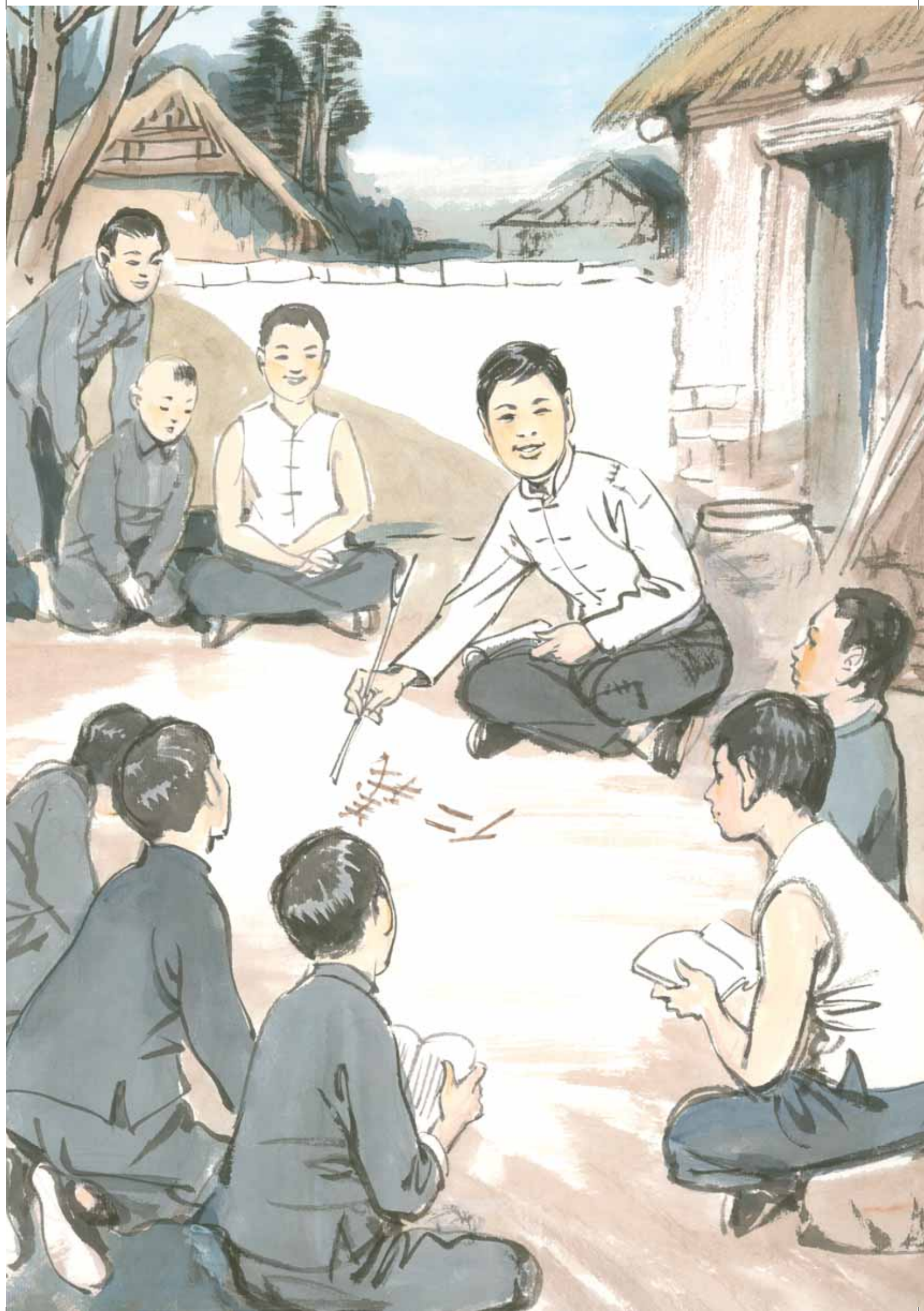
In the autumn, tiny toads hide under the rocks in the yard. When the children turn the rocks over, hundreds of toads hop out. They name the school Toad Hall.

One morning Yu Shu's mother doesn't feel well. She cannot move or turn over in bed. "Don't worry," she says. Yu Shu leans over to hear her. Her words are no more than a whisper. "I'll be well soon. Go on."

But he doesn't go. He stays by her side, only leaving to teach school. He feeds and bathes her and turns her over. On long cold nights, he stays awake and stokes the kang with corn stalks to keep her warm. He prays and fasts, but she doesn't get better.

A neighbor says, "Go find the fox spirit at White Cloud River. Set out a bowl covered with a red cloth and ask him for medicine."





The Fox Spirit

Before the morning light cracks the sky, Yu Shu sets out for White Cloud River, wearing a thin, ragged jacket against the cold. The sky grows dark and a great wind arises, screaming through the rocks like a horde of demons, driving snow into his eyes. Clutching his jacket tightly to his chest, he heads into the wind like a tiger and soon comes to the fox spirit's hut by the frozen river.

A white mist rises from the icy surface, like little ghosts. The wind dies down and it begins to gently snow. He places a bowl in the snow and covers it with a red cloth. Exhausted, he falls to his knees and asks the fox spirit for medicine.

Night comes, cold and dark. Stars twinkle dimly in the sky as he kneels all night, waiting. The next morning he lifts the red cloth, but there is no medicine. His fingers are stiff, and snow has piled up around his boots. He starts out for home, but the thought of his sick mother turns him back.

For three days and nights, he waits. Still no medicine. Picking up a handful of snow, he smashes it against a rock. "Fox Spirit, you are a fake!" he cries. His voice echoes up and down the river. With a deep sob, he gathers up the bowl and crunches home in the snow.

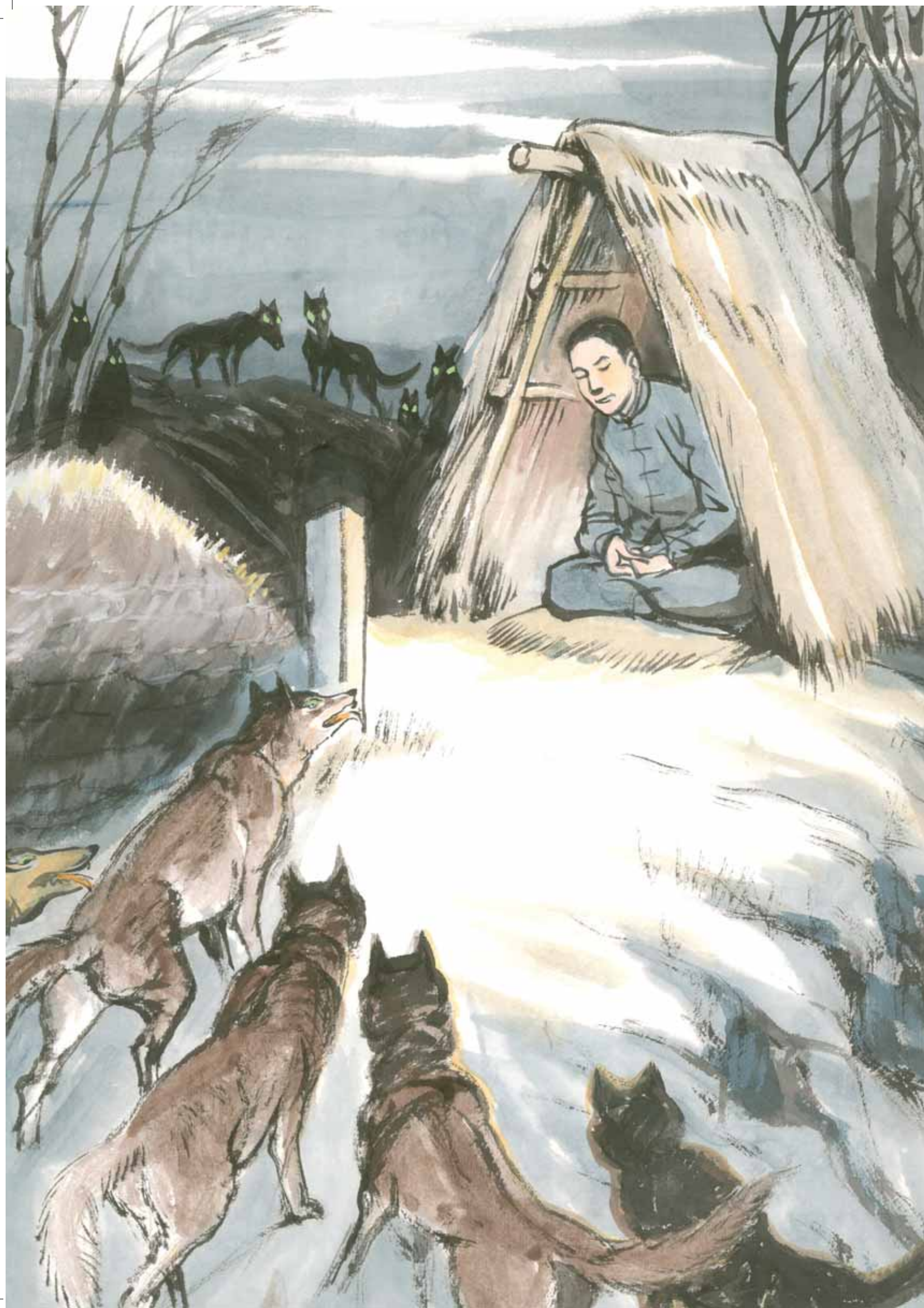
A few days later, he is feeding the ox when his father tells him that he will never see his mother again. It is March, the month of the blooming apricot trees, when the warm spring winds begin to melt the winter snow.

After the funeral, Yu Shu sits down on the earth beside his mother's grave and says to his elder brother, "Take care of our honorable father. I'm staying here." When everyone leaves, he says, "Mama, I'm going to keep you company, so you won't be lonely."

In China, the highest honor a son can show his mother is to sit in mourning by her grave for three years. This is what Yu Shu will do.







Sitting by His Mother's Grave

The first night Yu Shu is awakened by a growl. “Grrrrrr!” Gazing into the dark, he sees a large pack of wolf-dogs forming a circle and slowly closing in on him. Their white teeth flash in the moonlight and froth flies from their jaws. Their eyes are as fierce as fire. Snarling and gnarling, they slink low to the ground. “What can I do against a pack of dogs?” he asks. “I don’t even have a stick.”

He closes his eyes and waits. Suddenly one dog springs in the air and bites another dog, and that dog bites another. The whole pack starts yapping and snapping at each other. Turning, they run off. Their barking echoes in the night.

The second night mosquitoes come—big mosquitoes, buzzing and hungry for blood. “I could slap them,” Yu Shu says. “But they’re my friends.” So he takes off his shirt and says, “Come, you’re welcome to drink my blood. Please be my guests.” The mosquitoes land on his body and scuttle around, but then they buzz away without biting him. Yu Shu gives himself a new name, Mosquito.

The third night ants come—millions of ants. Yu Shu takes off his shirt again. Soon his body is black with crawling ants. But they don’t bite. “Go ahead,” he says. “Crawl into my ears, up my nose, and into my mouth. I won’t hurt you.” They stay for a while, and then crawl away. After that, Yu Shu signs his letters, Little Ant.

The fourth night cats come. “Hey, these are not cats!” says Yu Shu. “These are big-eyed rats.” The rats jump at his head. He puts his hand up to block them, but one bites him anyway. “Fine, I won’t fight you,” he says and leaves them alone. Soon, they scamper off.

The fifth night a ring of poisonous snakes comes. They hiss and curl themselves around his arms and legs, but none bite him. The sixth night, he is swarmed by huge centipedes.

“What’s going on here?” he asks. “I’ve been attacked by dogs, mosquitoes, ants, rats, snakes, and now centipedes. Ah, it must be a test because I’m doing a good deed sitting by my mother’s grave. Doing something good always puts one to test.”





Living Up to His Vow

The seventh day a rare fragrance fills the air, and a gray mist creeps across the patches of melted snow in front of the hut, bringing a promise of spring. Out of the mist, Yu Shu's father appears, bringing a basket of steamed dumplings. Yu Shu has not eaten in seven days, but he is not hungry. To please his father, he eats anyway.

"You don't need to bring me any more food, honorable Father," he says. "You're too poor. Anyway, I have plenty to eat."

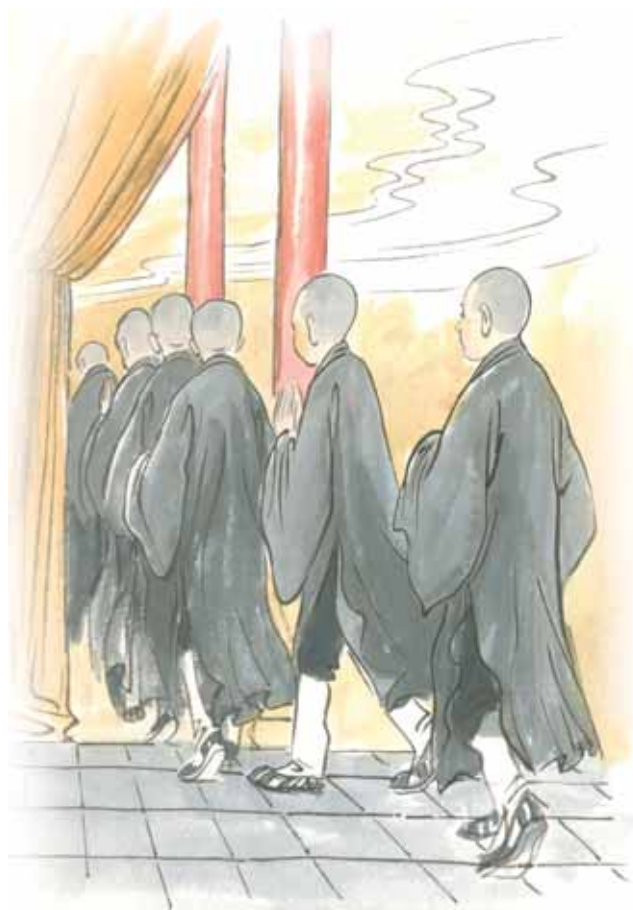
"Come home," his father begs, holding back the tears. "You're only nineteen. You're too young to do this."

"Even a crow returns to feed its feeble old parents," he says. "This is the least I as a human can do for my mother."

On the eighth day of April, 1937, Yu Shu walks to San Yuan Monastery to become a monk. Upon seeing him, Old Master's face breaks into a glowing smile. "So you have come!"

"Yes, I have come to fulfill my vows," he says, bowing deeply.

The gong is struck three times and incense is lit. Wearing the gray robes of a novice monk, Yu Shu enters the great Buddha Hall in a single line with the other young novices. He waits quietly for his head to be shaved, but inside his heart is jumping with joy. When he becomes a monk, he is given a new name. But to make it easy for the reader, we will simply call him the Master.



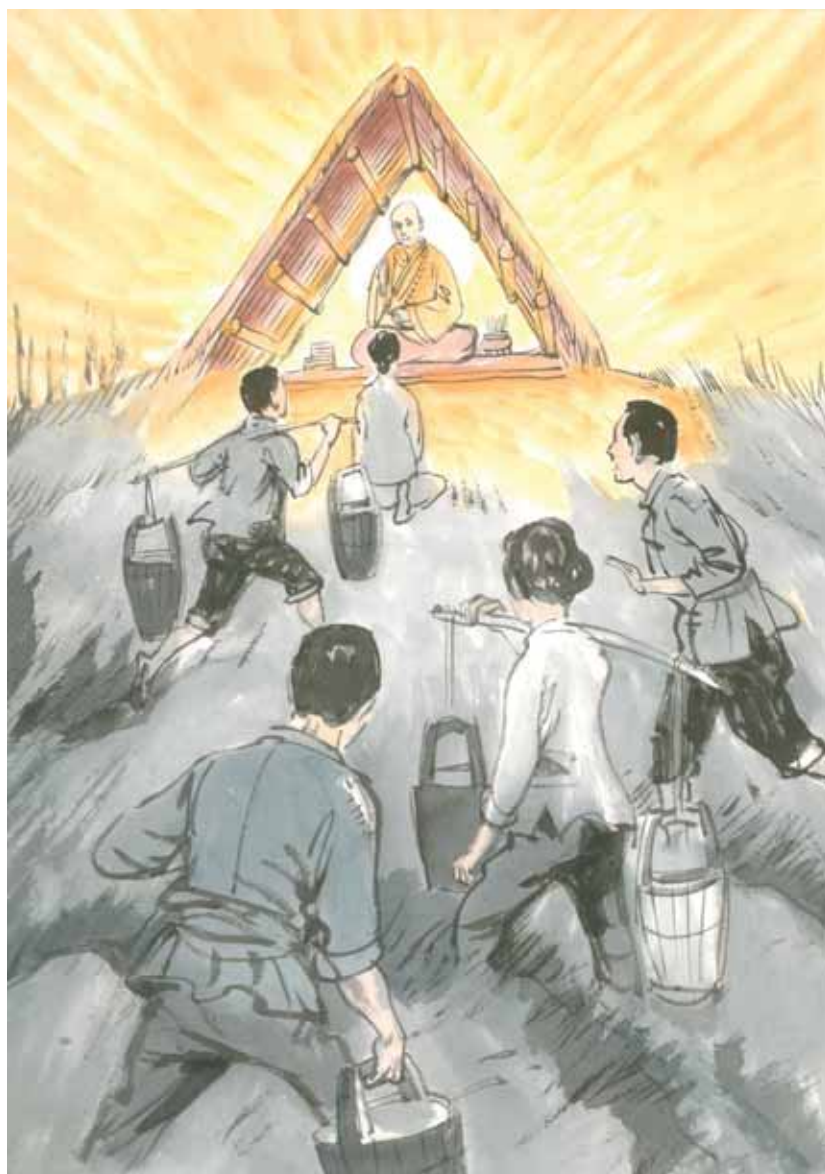
Eating the Bitter

A snowstorm sets in when the Master returns to the grave. Snow swirls in icy spirals through the little hut he made from sorghum stalks, and the cold winds bite through his thin clothing. He shuts his eyes to meditate and pays no attention to the weather. From this time on, he always sleeps sitting up in meditation. He says, “This way, I am alert and my thoughts do not get covered by clouds.”



Sometimes friends bring him food, but mostly he eats roots and leaves. Everyone worries about his health, but he says, “I don’t feel cold, and I don’t feel hungry. This is the power of vows.”

When he vowed to sit by his mother’s grave, he knew at times he would be cold, hungry, and lonely. In spite of the hardships, he endures them cheerfully. His only wish is to bring peace and happiness to everyone. “I vow to take on the hardships of all beings—those with two feet, four feet, many feet, and no feet. Whatever good comes my way, I will give to them.”



“The Hut’s on Fire!”

It is the end of a long and tiring day for the villagers. They are getting ready for bed when suddenly, a pillar of flames shoots up from the graveyard hilltop. “Good Son Bai’s hut is on fire!” yells a man, looking out the window. His cry is taken up by others.

“Hurry! Hurry!” Everyone races for buckets of water, screaming. “We must put out the fire, or the monk will burn to death!” And up the road the villagers scramble in the dark and cold, with lanterns, shovels, and buckets.

When they arrive at the little hut, they see no fire at all, only the Master sitting quietly in meditation. They look at each other in amazement. “Did the light come from the Master?” they ask. “Is he enlightened?”

The story spreads quickly. Visitors from far and wide come to pay their respects to the Master. Soon the little hut becomes the most popular place in the village. Within three years, the Master has more than 2,000 visitors. Some are curious. Some ask for blessings, others ask to be healed, and some bow to him. Whatever the reason, he touches each heart in a special way. He always has a kind and warm-hearted word for everyone, for that is all he has to give.



One Meal a Day

One cold winter—the coldest anyone can remember—Young Pan brings bad news. “Another country has made war on China. Many people are captured and put into labor camps. They don’t have enough food to eat or clothes to wear.”

Brushing away tears of ice, the Master says, “I can’t fight for my country, but I want to help in some way. From now on, I’ll eat only one meal a day. I’ll save my breakfast and dinner for those who do not have food. Maybe the food won’t go directly to them, but it will be there. And I won’t wear any more padded cotton. I’ll wear only one robe and save the cloth for others.” Thoughtfully, he adds, “We shouldn’t hate our enemies. Instead, we should treat them well.”





With the spring rains, comes a fever. It sweeps through the countryside, killing scores of people each day. Leaving the graveside for the second time, the Master goes down the hillside. He walks through the village, chanting the Great Compassion Mantra. The fever ghosts flee, and no one else dies from the fever. How many lives were saved that day, no one knows. A mantra is made of sounds that have spiritual meanings.

In the purple dusk of one evening, when the Master is sitting in meditation, the Great Master Hui Neng (Way Neng), who lived over one thousand years ago, mysteriously appears. He tells the Master, "In the future, you will go to America and spread Buddhism. There five lotus flowers will bloom." Taking five steps backwards, he disappears.



Dragon Clouds

At the end of three years, the Master leaves the grave and heads for Amitabha Cave in the snowy Chang Bai mountains. He wants to find a quiet place to sit and practice meditation.

It is after harvest. The chrysanthemums have withered and the wheat fields lie desolate. A few crows peck here and there. Red-cheeked children, riding stick horses, call to the Master as he walks down the road. Puffs of gusty wind dance around his feet. He is happy to be part of it all.

By the time he reaches the cave, the eastern sky has turned a bright orange, casting a golden glow over the valley. A drift of clouds appears overhead, floating like lazy dragons.

Finding the entrance to the cave, he steps inside. Suddenly, the ground moves underneath his feet and a huge snake heaves up in front of him. It slithers against the wall, hissing and swaying from side to side. Its evil eyes glare and its tongue flickers madly.

Closing his eyes, the Master chants the Great Compassion Mantra. The snake coils and lifts its head to strike, but it cannot move. The Master stops chanting. The snake uncoils and slithers out a hole in the jagged rock.

Stepping outside, the Master looks up and sees ribbons of clouds streaming across the sky. The ribbons swirl and curl into dragons, shining through the sunset. Their claws and scales glitter like brilliant jewels. Flying high in the air, they vanish into the darkening sky. The Master sighs. "So, it was the dragons who transformed themselves into that snake to test me."



The sylvan forest rings with a thousand voices. "Peep! peep! tui!" a blackbird pours out her song. "Oi! yeek!" a screech owl shrieks. "Tock, tock, tock!" a woodpecker pecks. A squirrel runs up and down a tree trunk, twitching its long tail and laughing with its jolly eyes. A tiger slinks by the cave on her way to the stream. Her cubs jump and snatch at her legs. "Good day! Good day!" they all seem to say.

The Master has many friends in the forest. "We share the same sky," he says. "We drink the same water. We may look different, but we have the same Buddha nature."

One day the Master goes to the village for supplies. On the way, he visits his uncle. His uncle says, "The kind fox spirit is visiting my no-good house today. Will you honor me by joining us for rice and tea? When he sees people, he changes into an old man with a long, white beard, so they won't be afraid of him." The Master is suspicious, but he agrees to stay.

After rice and tea, the fox spirit bows low to the Master and asks, "Venerable Master, will you take me as your disciple and teach me to become enlightened?"

The Master answers, "I waited three days for you to give me medicine. But you gave me nothing. How can you ask me for anything?"

"I wanted to," said the fox spirit. "But when I got near you, I was blinded by light."

"I know nothing about that," says the Master, puzzled. "Then I was wrong about you. *Hao ba!* Very well, I'll take you as a disciple." The fox spirit follows the Master everywhere—sometimes as an old man, sometimes as a spirit—protecting the Master and helping everyone.



Barefoot in the Snow

In due time the Master leaves the cave and returns to San Yuan Monastery. As a novice monk, he is given the hardest tasks—gathering vegetables, carrying water, and cleaning the pit toilets.

No one likes to clean the pit toilets. They are filthy and stinky. But the Master does not mind. He watches the dung beetles roll into balls and bury themselves in the muck. As he cleans away the filth, he tells them, “Don’t be afraid, I won’t hurt you. I’m your friend.”

The first winter at the monastery is dreadful. The weather grows colder and the snow drifts deep at night, covering the pathways. In the mornings, before the wake-up bell rings, the Master secretly sweeps the pathways clear so the other monks can find their way to the Buddha Hall. “Who does it?” the monks ask, pleased. But they never find out.

By this time, the Master’s robes are no better than rags and his shoes no more than holes. His toes stick out the front, and his bare heels stick out the back. Being of no use, he kicks them off and walks barefoot in the snow as if it were summer.

It is a cold, icy, and miserable day. The other monks warn him, but one monk, bigger and stronger than the Master, pulls off his shoes and socks and brags, “If Mosquito Monk can go barefoot, so can I!” Rubbing his hands together with glee, he stamps out into the icy snow. He stops dead and gives a little hop, then another little hop, and then a great whopping leap back onto the porch. “A-A-A-aaah!” No one can keep from laughing.

“How can you bear the cold?” he asks the Master.

“Since I don’t wear warm clothes, I don’t feel cold,” says the Master. “And since I don’t eat much, I don’t feel hungry.”

News of the kindhearted monk, who walks barefoot in the snow, spreads far and wide. A continuous flow of men, women, and children come to see him, seeking refuge. “I’m not worthy of being your teacher,” he says. “So I won’t become a Buddha until you all become Buddhas.”







Pan and the Sea Monsters

Pan is weak and frail. His illness, the sorcerers say, is caused by demons in his sleep. His parents clang copper pots at night to keep the demons away. They hire astrologers to scan the heavens for favorable signs. But there is no hint of good fortune for Pan.

At last there comes a sign. When Pan is eleven, he has the same dream for three nights. “Baba, Mama!” he says, “A happy, fat monk came in my dreams. He told me to go to San Yuan Monastery and find the mosquito monk, that he will help me.”

“But you’re too young, my peach tree,” say his parents. “Besides you’re too weak.”

“Please most kindly and honored parents,” says Pan. “If I wait, I’ll never be well.”

“Then do as you wish, our only and much beloved son,” say his parents, and send him off.

The next morning, with a bundle of food and the sad farewells of his parents ringing in his ears, Pan begins a journey that will last for weeks. How he has the strength, no one knows.

One night, bone-tired after walking all day, he stumbles off the road and falls asleep in a turnip patch. At daybreak, a low bark brings him to his feet. A pack of wild dogs slowly surround him. Quick as a whirlwind, he springs up and yells. “Get!” In a flash, the dogs spin around and charge into the turnips, their tails sticking up above the greens.

Weeks later the Master tells the gatekeeper, “A boy is coming here today. Bring him to me as soon as he arrives.” Sure enough, Pan rings the bell rope at dusk. The gatekeeper takes him to the Master. “What are you doing here?” asks the Master, peering through the twilight at Pan’s dirty face and clothes.

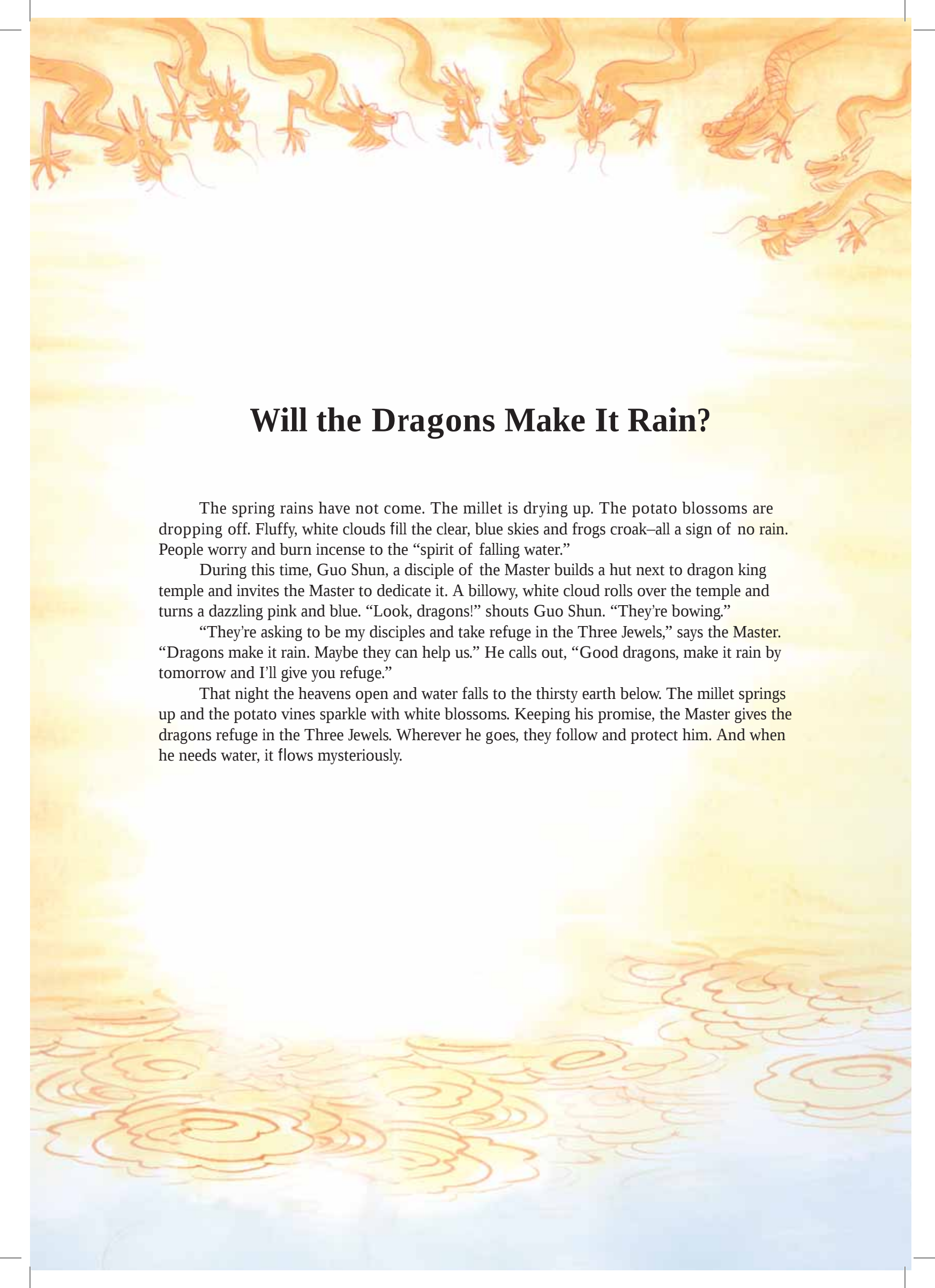
“I want to become a monk,” Pan says, his eyes weary.

“Nonsense!” says the Master, pretending to be annoyed. “I think you’re just cold and hungry and want some food and a place to stay.”

“But I dreamed that a happy, fat monk told me to come here. Look, there he is!” says Pan, pointing to a statue of a happy, fat Buddha on the altar.

“In that case, you may become a monk,” says the Master, crinkling his nose.

Looking into Pan’s illness, the Master sees that a sea monster is the cause. With its gigantic coils, it rises out of the misty sea of Pan’s dreams and sucks his energy with its silvery fangs. For days, the Master enters deep meditation and struggles with the monster until he subdues it. It agrees to release Pan from its evil, but warns the Master. “You’ve won this time. But I’ll get you back!” After that, Pan is no longer troubled by the monster and is as healthy as any boy can be.

The background of the page is a soft, yellowish-orange gradient. At the top, there is a row of several orange dragons, each with a different pose, looking down towards the text. At the bottom, there are stylized, swirling orange lines representing rain or clouds.

Will the Dragons Make It Rain?

The spring rains have not come. The millet is drying up. The potato blossoms are dropping off. Fluffy, white clouds fill the clear, blue skies and frogs croak—all a sign of no rain. People worry and burn incense to the “spirit of falling water.”

During this time, Guo Shun, a disciple of the Master builds a hut next to dragon king temple and invites the Master to dedicate it. A billowy, white cloud rolls over the temple and turns a dazzling pink and blue. “Look, dragons!” shouts Guo Shun. “They’re bowing.”

“They’re asking to be my disciples and take refuge in the Three Jewels,” says the Master. “Dragons make it rain. Maybe they can help us.” He calls out, “Good dragons, make it rain by tomorrow and I’ll give you refuge.”

That night the heavens open and water falls to the thirsty earth below. The millet springs up and the potato vines sparkle with white blossoms. Keeping his promise, the Master gives the dragons refuge in the Three Jewels. Wherever he goes, they follow and protect him. And when he needs water, it flows mysteriously.

China



Part II

A Long Journey





Little Ant

August, 1946. Wearing his old ragged robe and without a cent in his pocket, the Master sets out on a long journey to South China. He wishes to pay his respects to the greatest hero in Buddhism, Noble Empty Cloud, the most honorable monk in Buddhism. Along the way, he stays in the great monasteries and studies with famous teachers. Although he is penniless and wears an old ragged robe, he finds pleasure in simply traveling from place to place, in wonder of what each day will bring.

His first stop is Tianjin with its ancient walls and bustling city life. He spends the autumn studying at Great Compassion Temple. Next he goes to Shanghai and studies in a monastery where thousands of monks live.

With the first snows of winter, he reaches Right Enlightenment Monastery, tucked away in the beautiful violet-blue mountains of Hu Bei. He serves as the doorkeeper during the winter meditation retreat. By now, his only robe is no more than patches. Icy air creeps in through the cracks in the door and wraps itself around him, but a sweet fragrance fills the hall. Day by day, his meditation skills grow.

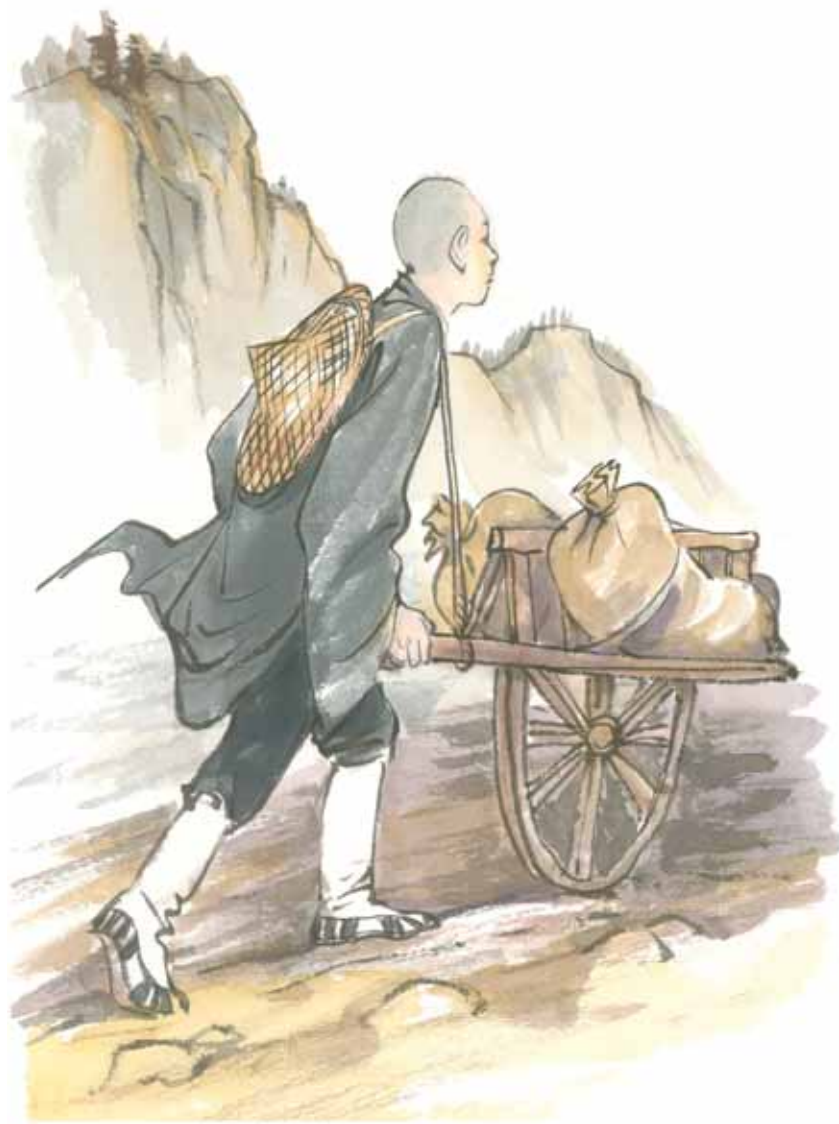
“Don’t you get cold?” asks a young monk.

“Who’s cold?”

“What a fool!” says the monk. “He doesn’t know he’s cold. Dumb ant!” The heckling and bullying never stop. The Master has no friends at all. But he never gets angry and treats everyone kindly. He says, “Actually, I’m a little ant crawling on the earth, way below any of you.”

In the early spring he takes a ferry to the sacred Pu Tou Mountain in the East China Sea, the home of Guan Yin, the great sage of kindness and compassion. The water sparkles and the waves slap at the ferry as it eases into the tiny harbor of the little island. The sky is the blue of heaven and the air is alive with the songs of larks. In the middle of the island stands a beautiful 100-foot statue of Guan Yin that overlooks the ancient temples and peaceful forests. The Master spends the summer at Pu Ji Monastery and is fully ordained as a monk.





Hangin Cliff Monastery

As the second autumn comes around, the Master heads west to Soochow, through a patchwork of rice paddies and blooming herbs. Farmers, standing knee deep in wet rice fields, point out the way to him. At the end of the day, when oil lamps are blown out in the villages and tired children curl up like puppies on straw mats. The Master sits under a tree in a mulberry grove to sleep. When spring arrives, the trees will be alive with silkworms hatching.

Soochow is a beautiful city, famous for its canals and sparkling monasteries hidden in the hills. After visiting a few monasteries, the Master follows a narrow path that twists its way up a steep mountain. An autumn drizzle dampens his robe, and a few fiery leaves drift to the ground, the only color in the foggy mountains. Climbing higher and higher, he reaches a monastery, enshrouded in mist and clinging to the sides of a cliff—Efficacious Cliff Monastery.

In the quietness of the monastery, he studies diligently and does whatever his masters ask of him, no matter how hard the task. Old Miao Chen, the abbot, admires his gentle nature and mild manners. He says to him, “As a young monk, you well know the lessons of the ancients. You are compassionate, yet cautious. On your journey, study with the greatest teachers, for there is more learning yet to come.”

Storm at Sea

When the Master boards a boat to Shanghai, the captain says, "You don't have to pay, monks bring good luck at sea."

Far out and deep in the Yellow Sea, a storm strikes, whipping the waves up to a dark sky. The boat is pitched about like a top. The passengers hold tightly to the railing, slipping and sliding against the fury of swirling spray. "Aie-e-e! The sea gods are angry," they cry.

A huge monster, twisting and thrashing wildly, rises out of the water, its scales glittering in the inky blackness. Only the Master sees it.

For three days and three nights, the storm rages on. The passengers become seasick and vomit overboard. The Master vomits until he is weak. Without rest, he calls upon Gwan Yin to carry the boat safely through the storm.

As quickly as it came, the storm rolls away. The monster fades into the azure water, never to be seen again. The sky brightens and a light breeze picks up, sweeping the boat along. Sea gulls flock around the boat once again, flapping their wings and screeching.

The one-week trip stretches into two weeks. Food is scarce and no one eats his fill. When the cook sees the Master eating only one meal a day, he slips him a piece of rice crust. But the Master doesn't eat it. He passes it to a young boy, who is weak with hunger.

At the end of the trip, the captain beams. "I was right," he says. "Monks bring good luck."



The Old Man on the Boat

Down the Yangtze River to Hangzhou, the Master notices an old man on the boat. The old man is bent over like a duck. "Why do you walk like that?" the Master asks.

"Eh?" says the old man. "I was put in jail. It was cold and damp."

"Would you like to get better?" asks the Master

"Of course," the old man replies. A crowd begins to gather.

"Well, throw your crutch over the side."

The old man's mouth falls open. "B-but I can't walk without it," he says helplessly.

"Do you think I'd cheat you?" says the Master. A hush falls over the crowd.

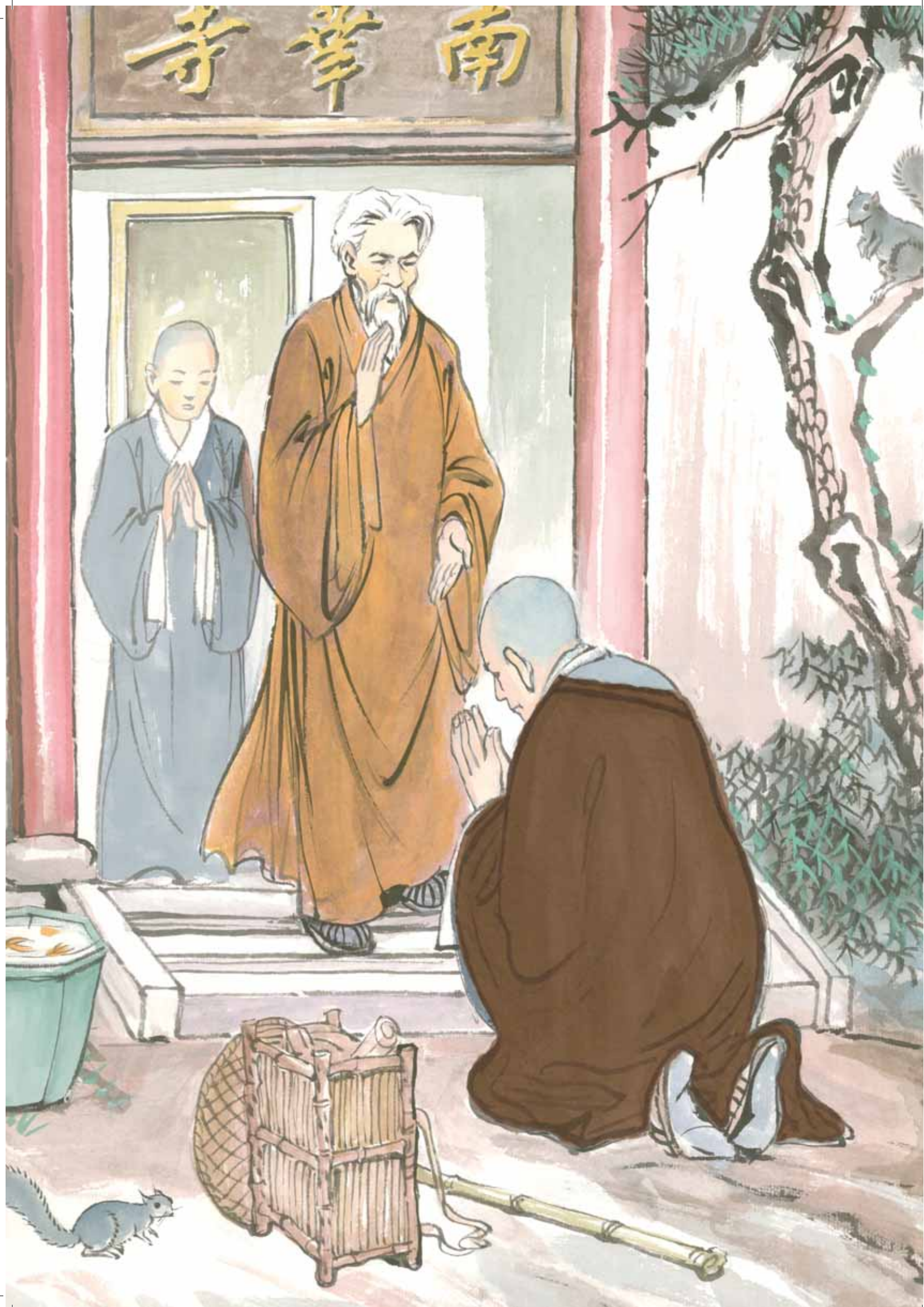
The old man looks closely at the Master's face. His eyes cloud with tears. "No, you wouldn't cheat me." Leaning over the rail, he tosses his crutch into the sea. Plop!

The Master rubs the old man's legs. "Now walk," he says. Slowly, the old man straightens up and takes a step. "Now run!" says the Master. The old man runs around in circles, making little excited yips and yelps. "May good fortune come to you!" he cries.

A woman in the crowd says, "My husband is sick. When we go ashore, will you help him?" A son says, "My mother is blind." And it goes on, everyone asking the Master to heal their relatives and friends. He makes no promises. And when the boat docks, he quietly steals off. He only wanted to help the old man. Now he has to be on his way—he has a mission to fulfill.



南華寺



Noble Empty Cloud

Bong, bong, bong! Temple bells ring out across the misty mountains. The Master has arrived at his destination, Nan Hua (Wah) Monastery—one of the oldest temples in China.

An old monk stands on the steps of the temple, waiting. The tattered sleeves of his robe billow in the wind. When he sees the Master, he says, “So it is.”

A soft breeze brushes the Master’s cheeks, and a feeling of peace fills his heart. He bows low to Noble Empty Cloud and says, “It is so.” This means that all beings have the Buddha nature and can become enlightened.

Noble Empty Cloud is quick to recognize the intelligent sparkle in the Master’s eyes, and he is eager to know everything about him. He asks many questions about his travels and is pleased to hear how fluently he speaks. Over the days, they spend most of their time together. A bright light follows them everywhere.

The Master’s job is to teach the new monks. One night he is awakened by loud drumming at the door. “Open up or we’ll break the door down!”

“Bandits! *Tu Fei!*” cry the students and scramble under the beds, leaving the Master to face them alone. Lighting a lantern, he flings open the door. The lantern rays fall upon a band of ruffians, lean and wild-looking with dirty, yellow teeth. They surround the Master, pointing a sea of knives at him. “Don’t move!” says the leader. “Give us your money.”

“Look at my robe, do I look like a rich man?” the Master asks, turning to the wall. He feels the point of a knife probing his back.

“No-o,” says the leader, eyeing the tattered robe. “But your students must have money.”

“If the teacher is poor, surely the students are poorer yet.”

The leader shrugs his shoulders and faces his men. “Take what you want!” he shouts. The bandits stomp around, looking for something to steal.

The Master follows close at their heels, warning them, “You shouldn’t steal from the Buddhas.”

Disgusted, the leader exclaims, “There’s nothing here worth stealing. Let’s go!”

Noble Empty Cloud is the 44th patriarch of Buddhism in China. A patriarch is the spiritual leader of a religion. The line of Buddhist patriarchs began with Shakyamuni Buddha in India, over 2,500 years ago and is still being passed on.

At this time Noble Empty Cloud is 109 years old and has been looking for someone to take his place. When he hears about the bandits, he says, “Mosquito Monk is an elephant and dragon for Buddhism. He is worthy of carrying on the work of a Buddha.” So he passes the mind-to-mind seal of the Buddha to the Master who becomes the 45th Patriarch of China. And he gives him the name Hsuan Hua (Shuan Wah).

That summer the Master is invited to Nanjing to teach the people about Amitabha Buddha. Many people come to hear him, but most of all he remembers a young girl named Xu (Shoo).



Three Wishes

What Xu wants most is to walk again. But when she tries, her trembling feet trip over each other and she falls down and throws a temper tantrum. Her little sister cries and her brothers tease her.

She was a happy child who sang as sweetly as a nightingale and danced with the grace of a deer. Then one spring the fever came and left her feet limp. She locked the songs in her heart, and now she weeps all day.

Her mother comes home from the market one morning, bursting with news. "The kind monk who walks barefoot in the snow is coming to Nanjing this week to teach us about Amitabha Buddha," she says. "Perhaps he can help Hsu, our little plum blossom."

Xu and her family are the first to arrive at the temple the next day. Swirls of incense smoke curl around her as she sits on the edge of her seat, eagerly listening to the Master's stories. At the end of his talk, he walks over to her and holds up three fingers. "You have three wishes."

Xu stares at the kind-faced monk. "I wish to walk again and to dance."

"You have one more."

Xu swallows and slides down in her seat. *I don't want him to know.* He waits. Taking a deep breath, she sighs. "I have a terrible temper. My third wish is for a kind heart."

The Master says, "Be patient and chant the Buddha's name."

The week rolls on with Xu going to the temple every day. She works hard on her wishes too. She rubs her stiff legs until she can wiggle her toes. Holding onto her mother's hand, she hesitantly tries one foot and then the other until both firmly touch the ground. Her legs become stronger and soon she can walk alone. Her first wish has come true.

She opens her heart and sings again, and when her brothers tease her, she only gets a little mad. Her kind heart is growing back. One day she will dance.

On the Master's last day, she says to him, "You made my wishes come true."

"You did the work, not me," he says, patting her on the head.

A Sad Farewell

In May 1949, the Master travels south to help Noble Empty Cloud repair an old temple. It is in the sticky heat of summer and the warm air fills the Master's lungs. He is overcome with dizziness and runs chills and fever for days. Too weak to carry on, he says to Noble Empty Cloud, "I must return to Nan Hua to heal."

"There is a revolution in China," says Noble Empty Cloud. "If you go, it will be difficult to return."

"Don't worry, I'll be back."

With tears in his eyes, Noble Empty Cloud takes his hand. "On your journey, make every effort to speak in the name of the Buddha. Build temples and monasteries. There is limitless light on the road ahead. Push on, work hard, conduct yourself well, and don't forget that I am waiting. Take care and good-bye."

By August the Master is well and ready to return south. At the border, the guards tell him, "The road is cut off. You can't go back!"

The Master goes to the railway station. He has no money to buy a ticket, so he sits down and waits. A man sits down beside him and asks, "Where are you going?"

"To Hong Kong."

"I'm going there too. I'll buy you a ticket." The Master boards the train heading south, unaware of what is to come.



Hong Kong

As the revolution grows in China, religions are outlawed and thousands of monks and nuns flee to Hong Kong. They have no place to live and nothing to eat. Lining the streets, they beg for food and shelter.

The Master, too, must search for a place to live. He finds a small dark cave on a mountainside overlooking Hong Kong. But so high up, not a trickle of water flows.

He moves in anyway. Sitting on a flat rock, he goes into a deep meditation for one hundred hours. When he tries to stand up, he cannot move his legs. "So be it," he says and continues to sit, stretching out his legs little by little until he can walk again.

Hearing the sound of gurgling water, he steps outside to discover two springs bubbling up in the dry earth. He takes a sip of water and says, "This water tastes like sweet dew. I wonder where it came from. A drift of clouds pass overhead. They look like dragons.

Although the cave is hidden far away, word of his wisdom and compassion spreads, and hundreds of people come to seek his help. One such visitor is old Guo Man. She has always been afraid of monks, but she climbs up the steep mountainside anyway to visit him. "Would you like a drink of water?" the Master asks her.

"Yes, thank you," she whispers. "It's scorching hot today." Taking a sip, she exclaims, "This water is sweet! Did you put sugar in it?"

"If it's sweet, then drink some more," he says.

The next time Guo Man visits the Master, she brings him a new robe. "I made it myself," she says, beaming.

The Master is happy with his old robe, but he knows that the cloth cost a lot of money. "*Hau ba!* Good!" he says, "I'm due for a new one!" The twinkle in his eyes shows his gratitude.

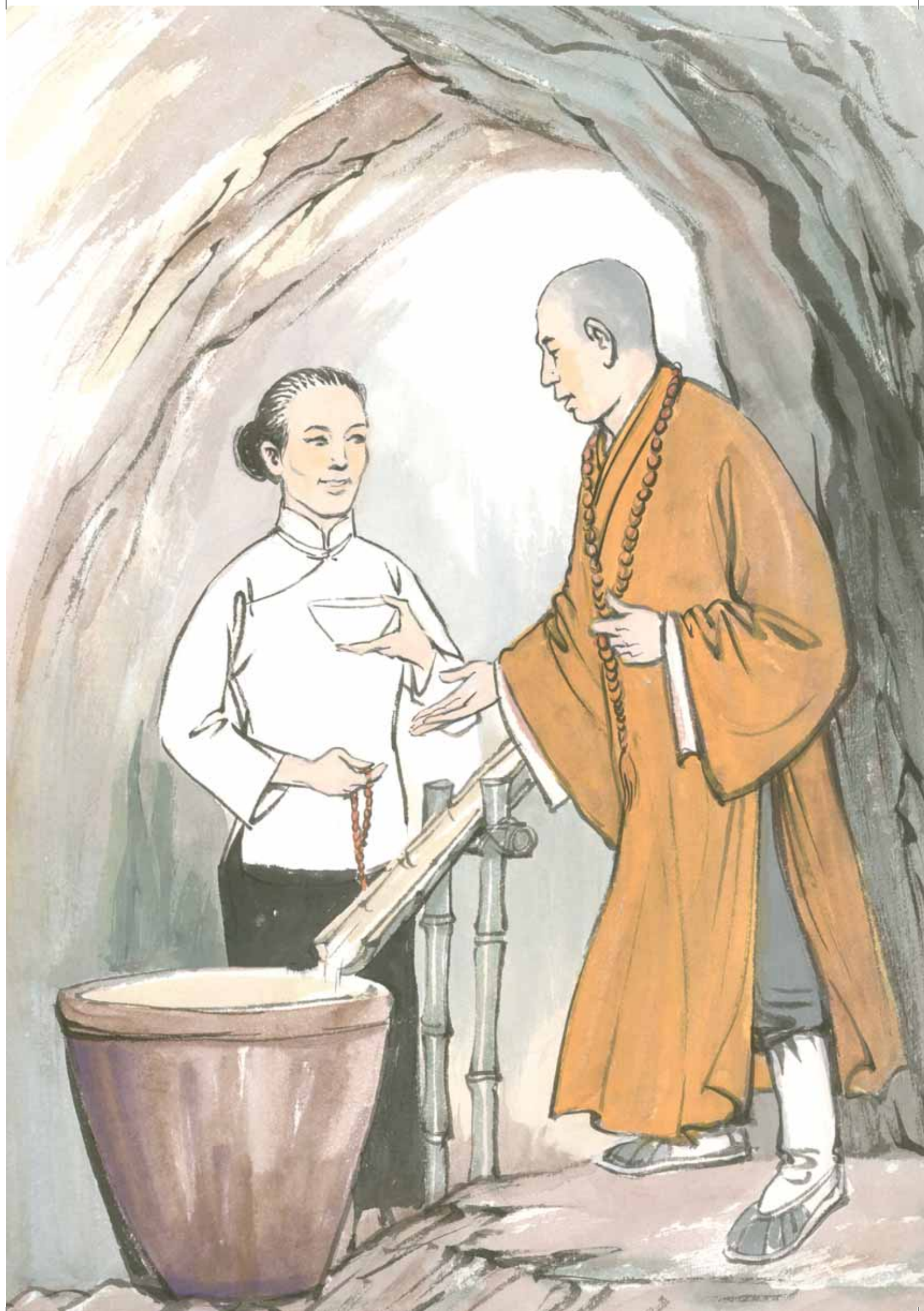


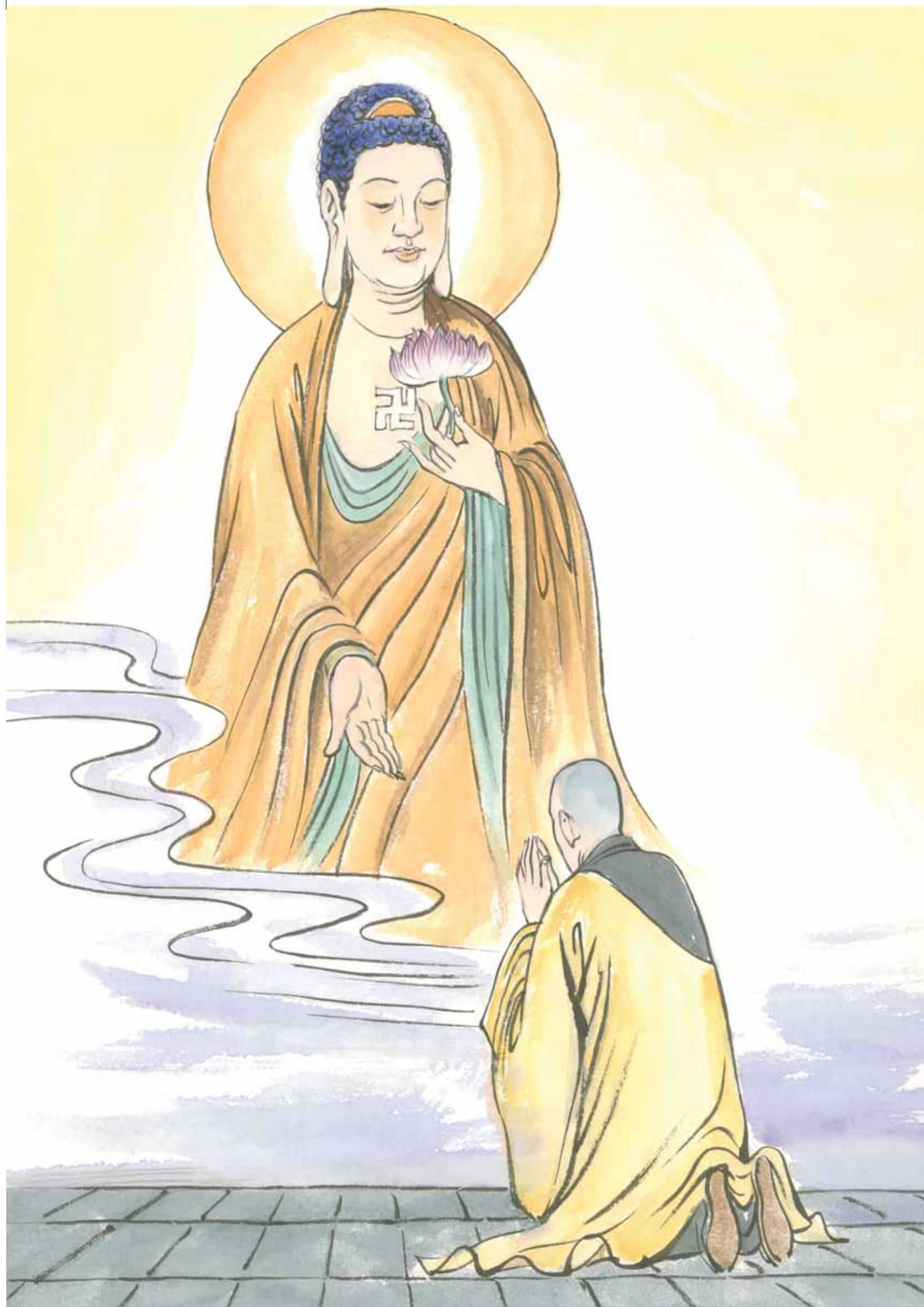
Moving a Boulder

One morning the Master hears a ruckus outside the cave. Scrambling out, he sees two strong men trying to push a boulder down the mountainside to repair the road. Deciding to join the fun, he says, "Wait a minute, let me try."

The men stand back. Bracing his wood staff under the boulder, with one push the Master sends it crashing down the mountainside. The men stare in awe. "You should hire me," he says, mischievously. "And I eat only one meal a day."

One day Kuo-man climbs up to the cave to find it empty. The two springs are bone dry. She does not know where the Master has gone.







Western Bliss Gardens

Life for the monks and nuns in Hong Kong becomes worse. Wishing to help them, the Master leaves the quiet cave. He begs and borrows enough money to give 4,000 monks and nuns each \$15.50 Hong Kong dollars, a bolt of cloth, and a box of medicine.

Some goodhearted people see what he is doing and want to help. One rich man offers him a piece of land on top of Horse Mountain. "There is no water up there," he says, "but you are welcome to it."

"It's a good place for a temple," says the Master. "I'll accept the offer."

The only way to the top is to climb 300 rickety steps that wind through the poorest slums of Hong Kong, with people chatting and quarreling, dogs barking, and vendors hawking. But once on top, the view sweeps down to the bright blue sea where *junks* with eyes painted on them so they can see, sail lazily out to sea.

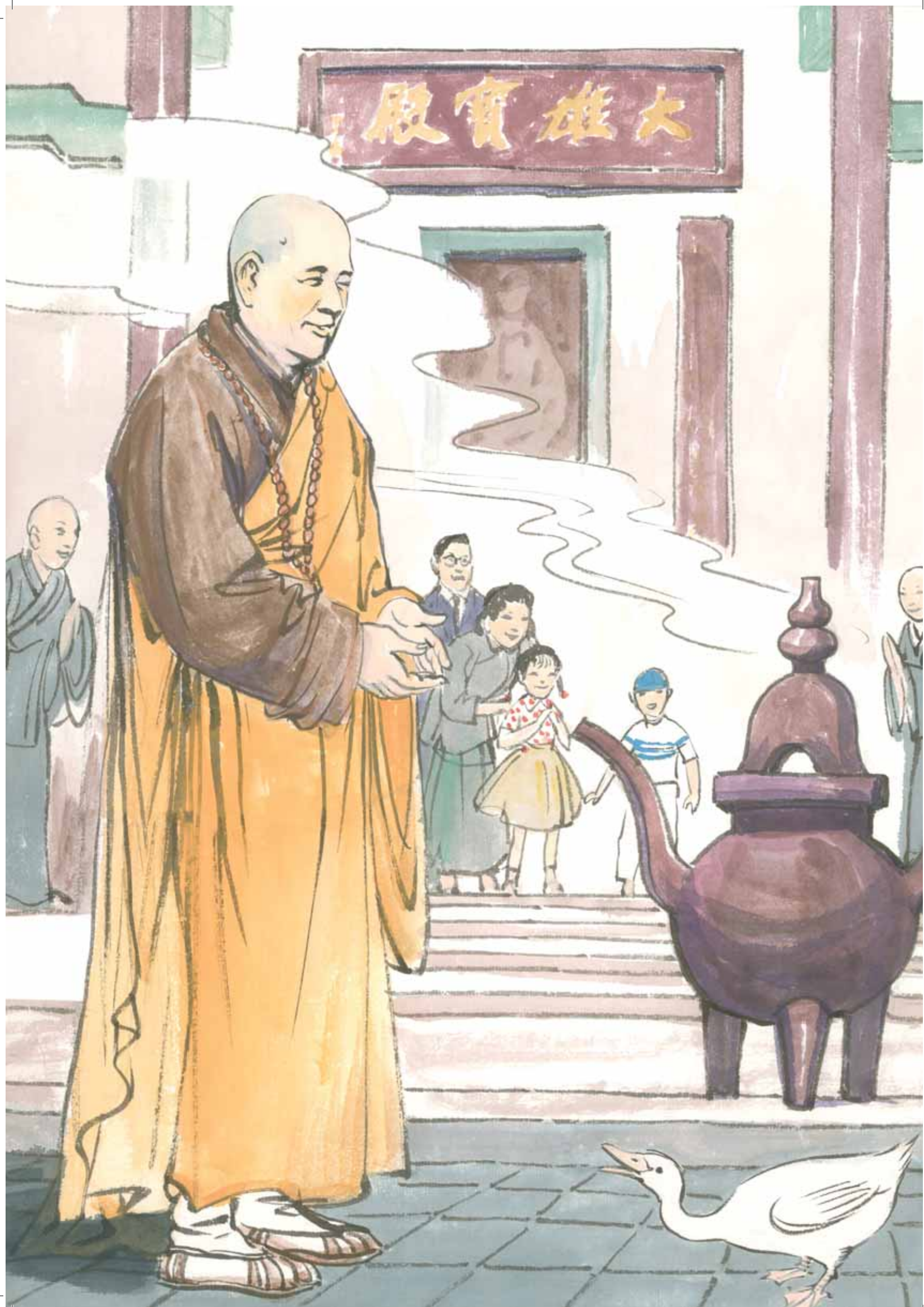
With his strong hands, the Master carries buckets of water and baskets of brick up the steps. Some people help, but most of the work he does himself.

The temple is finished in December 1951. The Master names it Western Bliss Gardens. It sparkles like a jewel in the mountain air, and lovely flowers with their magical fragrances fill the gardens. Hundreds of people visit and admire the temple and the view. But most of all, they are moved by the Master's kindness and wise words.

Placing his image of Amitabha Buddha on the altar, the Master says, "This is your new home." And he makes the same vow that he made many years ago. "I vow to become a Buddha and bring happiness into the world."

After he moves in, he finds a crack in a stone behind the temple. Every day he kneels beside it and asks Amitabha Buddha for water. Soon a trickle oozes from the crack. Gradually, water begins to flow.

The Master offers the workers a drink. "Ah, this water is sweet!" they exclaim. "Did you put sugar in it?" He smiles. The days of carrying water up the rickety steps are over.



A Duck in the Temple

One day a little duck, with a carrot-colored beak, pops its head in the temple door and waddles in. Shaking its tail feathers, it settles down in front of the Master, who is giving a Dharma talk. Where the duck came from, no one knows.

“Shoo!” Someone says. The duck retreats, fluttering and fussing, but in a flash, it is back again.

“Shoo, shoo!”

“Let it stay,” says the Master. And to the wonder of all, he gives the duck refuge in the Three Jewels, and it becomes a disciple of the Buddha. Dropping to the floor, the duck bows its head three times and leaves noiselessly.

As the summers and winters pass, thousands of people climb the steps to Western Bliss Gardens. The miracles and wonders that touch people’s hearts cannot be counted, but the stories of the Master’s kindness and compassion live on.



A year later the Master is standing under a peach tree. A woman runs up to him and says, “I’ve found you at last! I have been looking everywhere for you.” It is old Guo Man.

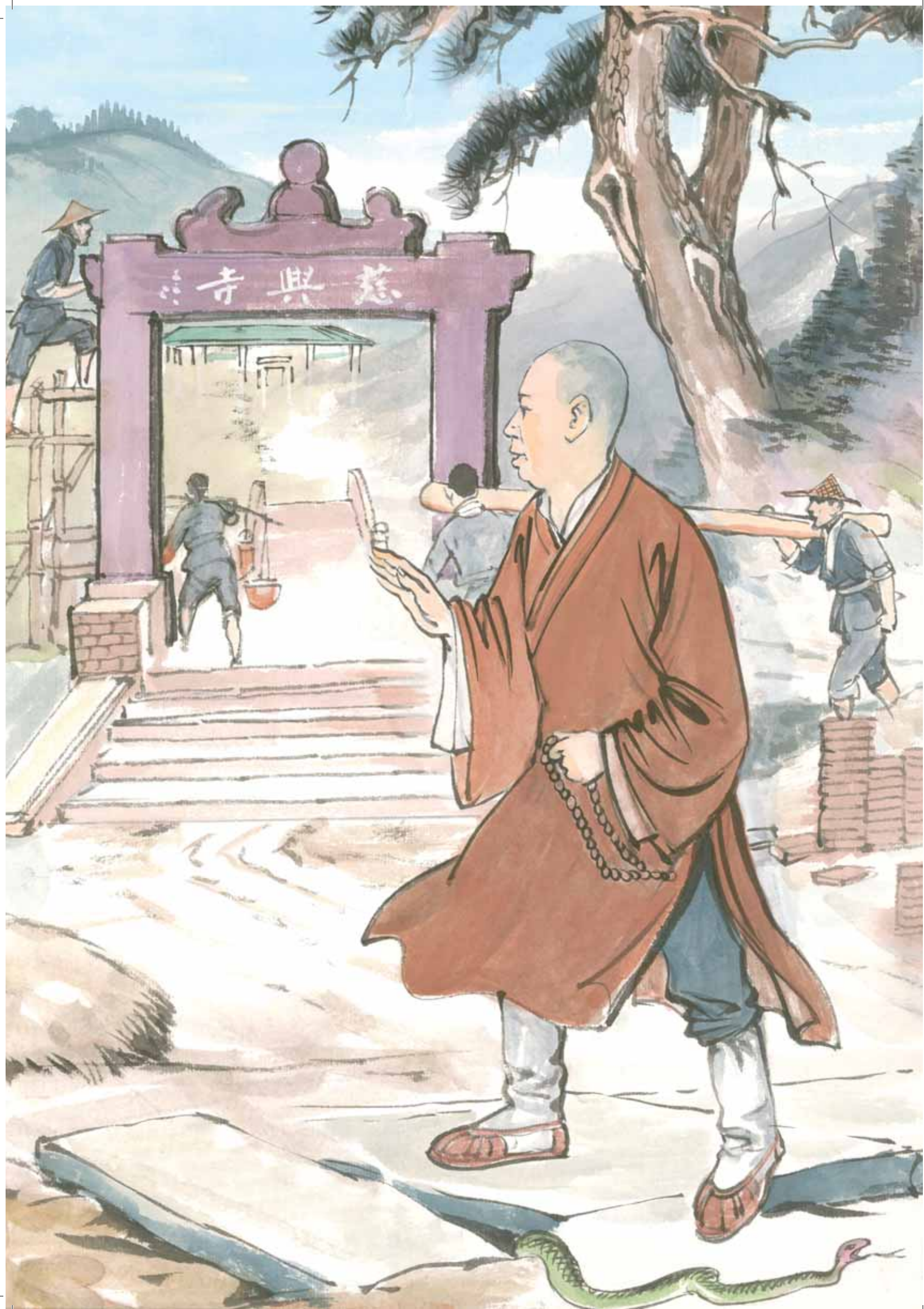
A gentle breeze rustles the leaves of the peach tree. Looking up, she screams, “Caterpillars! They scare me to death.” The tree is alive with tiny caterpillars, squirming and wiggling on the swaying branches.

“Don’t worry,” says the Master. “Come back tomorrow and they’ll be gone.”

When she comes back the next day, she doesn’t see one caterpillar. “What happened to the caterpillars?” she asks.

“I asked them to leave,” he says. “They aren’t really caterpillars, but dragons that transformed themselves into caterpillars. They protect the temple.”

“What’s there to be afraid of then?” replied old Guo Man.



Subduing a Dragon!

On Lantau Island, beyond Hong Kong, hidden in a grove of trees, the Master acquires the ruins of an old monastery. The roof is falling in and the walls are crumbling, but there is plenty of land. "I have a vow to build a monastery where hundreds of monks and nuns can worship together," says the Master. "This is the place."

With a little money, a little help, and a big dream, he begins to rebuild. But building on the island is not easy. He must carry all the food and building supplies to the island by ferry, and then up the steep mountainside. The winds whip around him on the ferry and the rain quickly soaks through his thin robe, but he never slows down and rests.

Once completed, the new monastery with its white walls and red pillars is as beautiful as the misty mountains and silent blue sea that lies beyond it. The Master calls it Overflowing Compassion.

One day when the Master is in Hong Kong, a poisonous snake with a red head and green body slides up beside a man who is painting a wall. "Yipes!" the man yells and falls backwards. The paint bucket flies into the air and plummets to the ground. Thud! White paint splashes all over him.

"You scared the wits out of me," he says to the snake, and grabbing a barrel, he scoops the snake into it and takes it far away. By the time he returns, the snake is back too.

"Back in the barrel you go!" This time the man takes the snake far, far away. Again the snake comes back, sliding in and out of the doorways, keeping far away from barrels. Time and time again, the same thing happens. Everyone is terrified.

When the Master returns and hears about the snake, he says, "I know how to get rid of it." And he sculpts a dragon on a craggy rock behind the left side of the monastery. The dragon's eyes glow like embers and its claws stretch out, as if flying in the wind. The snake mysteriously leaves and never returns. The Master calls the rock Dragon-Subduing Rock.



Taming a Tiger!

Every rainy season, the road that leads to the monastery is flooded by a stream that swirls and rises with the strength of a tiger. “I can tame that tiger!” says the Master, and he builds a stone bridge that arches like a rainbow over the stream. Underneath the bridge, he digs a pool that allows the stream to continue flowing to the sea.

“The pool will be for liberating life,” the Master says. “We’ll have a liberating life ceremony this Sunday.”

That Sunday, men, women, and children come, lugging baskets of frogs, crates of turtles, and buckets of fish that they bought early that morning at the Hong Kong market.

Standing on the bridge, the Master tells the sea creatures, “These good people will release you to swim freely. Their hope is that you will never be snared in nets or devoured by predators and will live long, happy lives. You should help other creatures in the sea.”

Crates are unhinged, basket lids opened, and buckets tipped. Fish, frogs, and turtles pour into the pool. The hearts of the people almost burst with joy, as they chant the Buddha’s name.

Only one little fish remains, floating on top of the water, lifeless. Everyone continues to chant the Buddha’s name. A streak of lightning dances across the sky and a roll of thunder rumbles through the valley. Wind comes up and rain showers down. But the people keep chanting until the little fish rolls over, flips its tail, and swims away.

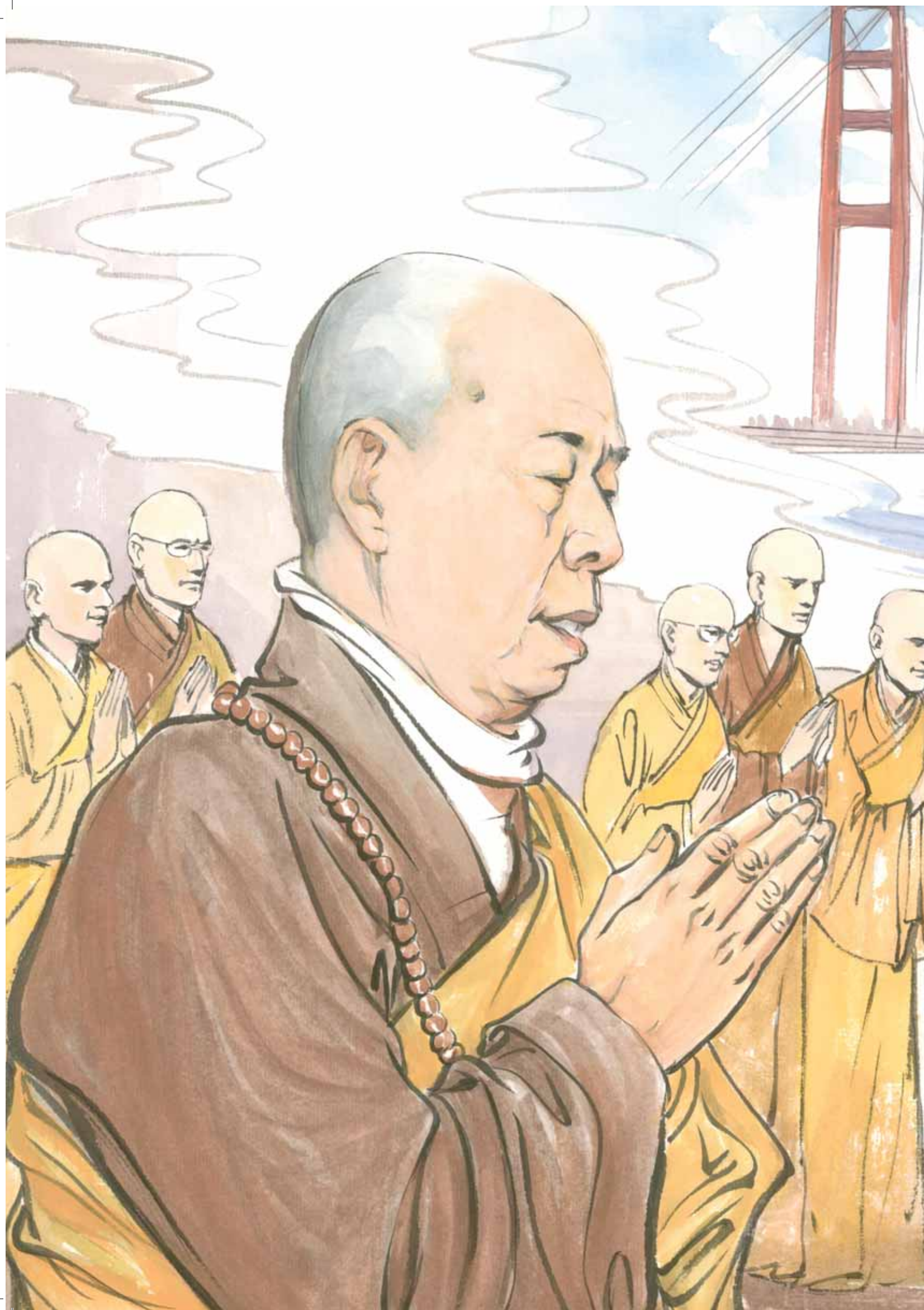
With rain soaked clothing, the people scramble down the path to catch the ferry back to Hong Kong. Their hearts are warmed by the joy of saving the lives of so many creatures. The Master names the stream Tiger-Taming Stream.

Wishing for Buddhism to flourish in Hong Kong, the Master oversees the printing of sutras and has hundreds of exquisite Buddha images made by the best artists. He says, “Sutras are like lamps on a dark road. Buddha images inspire people to become Buddhas.”

The Master helps to build more Buddhist temples, and Buddhism blossoms in Hong Kong. Monasteries dot the mountainsides and temple bells ring throughout the city. Due much to his hard work and compassion, Hong Kong is restored to a place of hope for many. Monks and nuns can now worship together and parents can raise their children in peace and safety.







America

In 1959, the Master visits Australia, the land of kangaroos and koalas. But no one is interested in Buddhism and he is ignored. The only food he can afford is white bread. A loaf lasts him a week. But he goes about cheerfully, planting seeds for the future of Buddhism. Then, good fortune comes his way, and he is given a job teaching Chinese at a university.

After one year, he returns to Hong Kong to find that some of his most trusted disciples have moved to San Francisco. In 1962, they send him an airline ticket with a message: We'll meet you at the airport. At this time the Master is forty-six years old.

The day he arrives in San Francisco, the hills are blazing with bright orange poppies. "So this is why the Chinese call this place Gold Mountain," he says.

He moves into his new home, a dark basement in the heart of Chinatown. The first night is one of the longest in his life. "I don't think the sun will ever rise," he says. He thinks the sun will never rise. When he opens the door, he sees why. There are no windows. No sunlight. No moonlight. But it's all his disciples can afford, so he happily makes himself at home.

Later he moves out of Chinatown into a flat on Waverly Street. It is full of light and fresh air. The first day of moving in, windows open and pale faces with blue eyes peer down at him. "Who are they?" The Master asks the owner.

"Students."

"I like students," the Master says and tacks a note on his door. *Meditation 7 p.m.*

That night at seven o'clock, he hears a rap on the door. "I'm interested in meditation," says a student, wearing a plaid shirt and blue jeans. "I'm studying Chinese," says another. She wears a flower in her hair.

"There's no heat, but you're welcome," says the Master. "I teach vegetarian cooking. You like, eh?"

"We sure would!" The Master's first American students have arrived.



The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas

It would take a giant-sized book to tell the adventures of the Master with those first students, for you can be certain he had many. The difficulty is which ones to choose. I would certainly begin with the summer of 1968, when he first taught Buddhism to some American students. He knew a little English and they knew a little Chinese. With this, the translation of Buddhist sutras into English began.

Following this would be the story that came true about five lotus flowers blooming in San Francisco. This means that five Americans became ordained Buddhist monks and nuns. This was the beginning of the Sangha in the history of American Buddhism.

And I would tell the story of how the Master bought a big, old mattress factory and turned it into Gold Mountain Monastery. And how, when it became too small for all the new Buddhists, he bought an old hospital in Ukiah Valley, north of San Francisco. He called it the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

Should you go there today, you would see children playing under redwood trees and peacocks strutting across the lawn. And if you look carefully, you might see dragons flying through the clouds.

Should you be a student at Instilling Goodness Elementary School or Developing Virtue High School, you would study the same *Standards for Students* that the Master studied as a student. And for the happiness of your parents, you would abide by them.

When your parents are calling,

Answer them right away.

When your parents tell you to do something,

Do not be lazy or sulky.

Perhaps we could ride the wind to the four corners of the earth where the Master has established Buddhist centers in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan. And in every place, we could read Buddhist books that have been translated so far into English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Polish. This is the Master's vow fulfilled. And we would abide by the Six Principles that the Master followed all his life:

No fighting

Be peaceful

No greed

Be generous

No selfishness

Be humble

No seeking

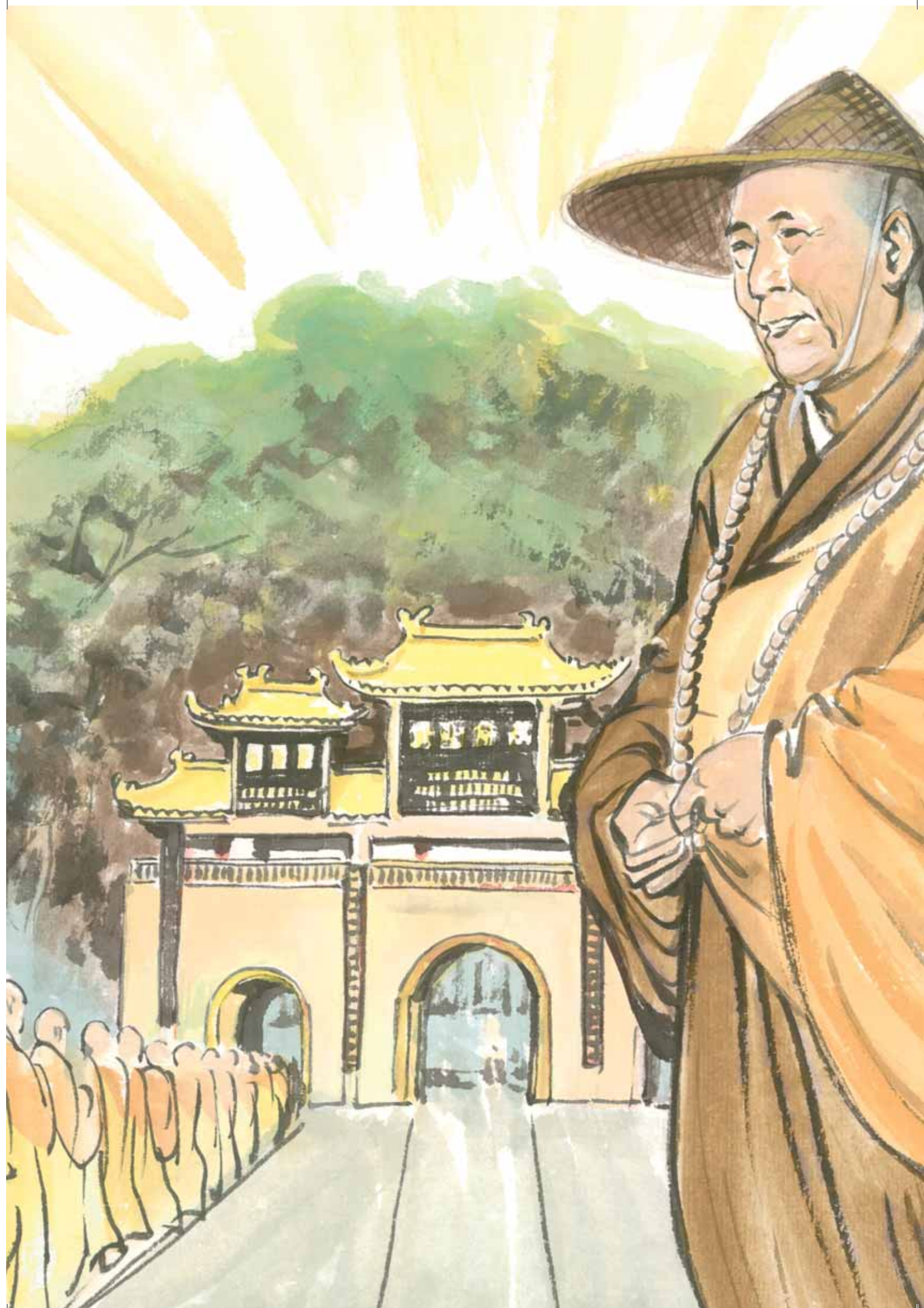
Be content

No self-benefit

Be a good team player

No lying

Be truthful



Feeding the Ants

We could write an ending to the adventures of the Master or write the beginning of new adventures for those who carry on his work. For on the afternoon of June 7, 1995, he died at the age of seventy-seven. Before he died, he asked that his ashes be scattered over the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to feed the ants.

The followers of the Master were greatly saddened by his death, but they were not discouraged. He left behind a line of monks and nuns and friends, in whose hearts his spirit lives on. Each has his or her own story of how he changed their lives for the better.

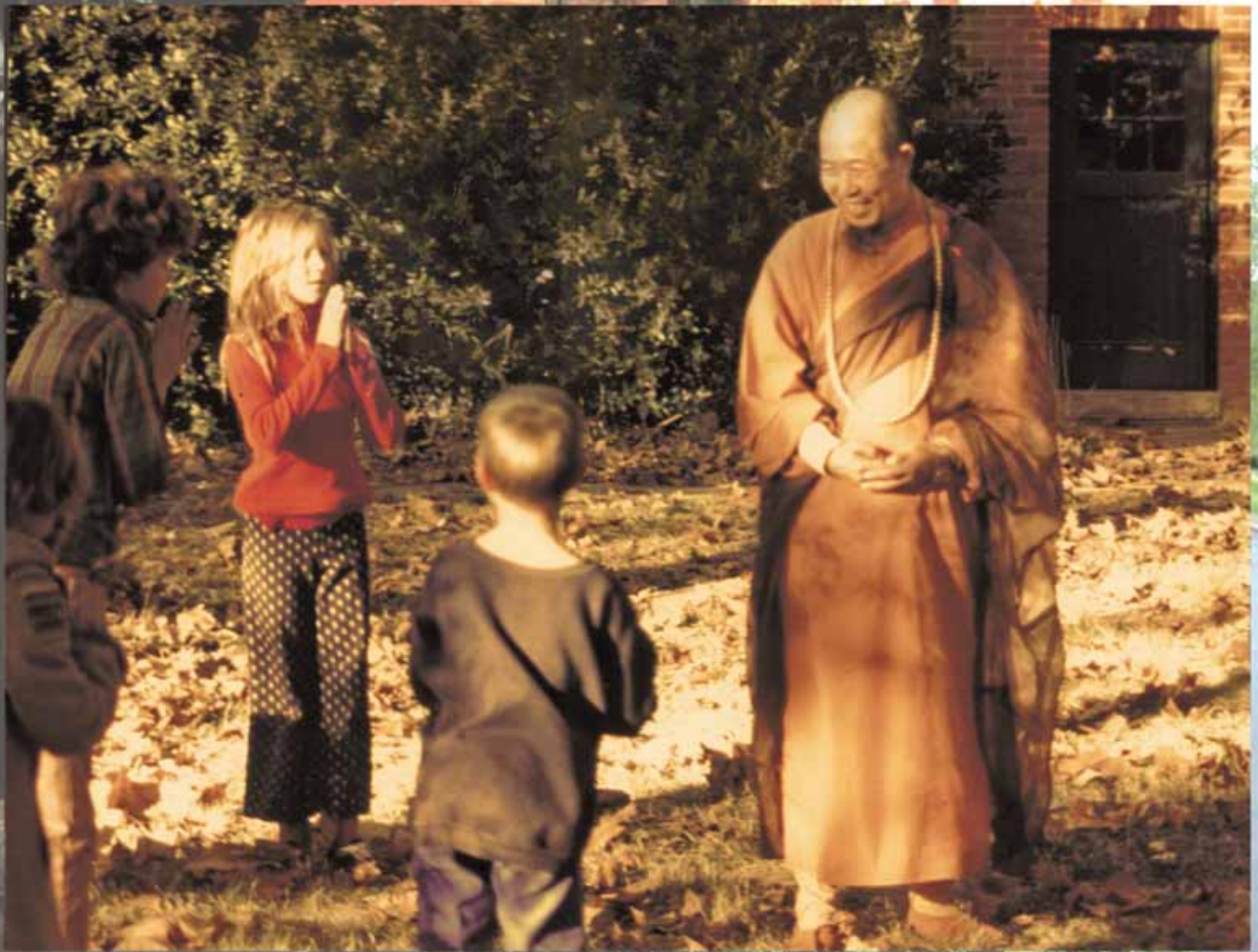
The Master traveled the world over, promoting peace and happiness. With simple words and a sense of humor, he shared the Buddha's teachings with all who wished to listen. He told stories, taught truths, and revealed the deep meanings of the Buddhas's teachings. He saw to the translation of the Buddhist sacred writings into English and other languages. His hope was that Buddhism would remain in the world forever. He devoted his life to others, offering them kindness, compassion, and joy. He called himself a monk in a ragged robe. His last words were, "I came with nothing and I will leave with nothing."

The Master made 18 great vows while sitting by his mother's grave. Some of the vows are listed below in simple language to inspire children.

1. I vow not to become a Buddha until every single being in the world is enlightened.
2. I vow to dedicate the blessings and happiness that I should receive to others.
3. I vow to take upon myself the hardships of others.
4. I vow to cause everyone to correct their faults and go toward the good.
5. I vow that all who see my face or even hear my name will soon become enlightened.
6. I vow to do what it takes to lead all beings to enlightenment, and I vow to fly.
7. I vow to fulfill all my vows.







Words by Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

"Children, if you want to help the world, first build up your character and develop your own virtue. This means that you must become a good and noble person and be well educated. You should not smoke and drink, or take drugs and gamble. You should not have any bad habits at all."



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Human Roots, Buddhist Stories

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The Light of Hope (English and Chinese)

The Spider Thread (English and Chinese)

Under the Bodhi Tree

The Kind Monk

**To order books, please visit: bttsonline.org or write:
City of 10,000 Buddhas, 4951 Bodhi Way, Ukiah, CA 95482**

Instilling Goodness Books, a branch of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, aims to bring an understanding of Buddhism to all children in their own languages. Ancient stories are retold and illustrated by modern Buddhist educators, artists, and children alike. Books and materials contain activities and lessons in spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

Headquarters is located at the City of Ten Thousand Buddha, a spiritual community founded by Venerable Master Xuan Hua. It is also the home of Dharma Realm Buddhist University, Instilling Goodness Elementary, and Developing Virtue Secondary Schools. For information about schools and summer camp, please visit our website at www.igdvs.org.

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