**Chapter 1: The Origin of the Monkey King**

**Cultivating the Roots and Nurturing the Source: The Origin of the Great Dao**

**Poem:**

Before chaos was divided, heaven and earth were in disorder;  
Vast and boundless, none could see its form.  
Since Pangu shattered the primordial void,  
The clear and pure rose, and the turbid sank.  
All living beings prosper under heaven's grace,  
And all creations thrive as goodness takes form.  
To understand the workings of creation's cycles,  
One must read the tale of *Journey to the West*.

It is said that the lifespan of the heavens and the earth is measured as 129,600 years, known as one cosmic epoch (*yuan*). A *yuan* is divided into twelve cycles, corresponding to the twelve branches: Zi, Chou, Yin, Mao, Chen, Si, Wu, Wei, Shen, You, Xu, and Hai. Each cycle spans 10,800 years. If we compare this to a single day: the **Zi hour** marks the rise of yang energy; **Chou** signals the cock’s crow; **Yin** begins the dim light, and **Mao** sees the sun rise. As the day progresses, the **Chen hour** brings the morning meal, **Si** continues the day’s hustle, **Wu** marks the zenith of the sun, and **Wei** begins the westward decline. The **Shen hour** leads to dusk, **You** sees the sun set, **Xu** brings twilight, and **Hai** ushers in quiet night.

In this grand cosmic cycle, the end of the **Xu period** leads to the fading of the heavens and earth into obscurity, and all beings fall into decline. After another 5,400 years, at the beginning of the **Hai period**, darkness consumes the world, and no living creatures remain—this is what is called chaos. Another 5,400 years pass, and as the **Hai period** reaches its conclusion, a new cycle begins, nearing the **Zi period**, when light gradually returns. The philosopher Shao Yong once wrote:

“Winter solstice marks the middle of Zi;  
Heaven’s heart moves unchanging.  
The first spark of yang stirs,  
Though all things await birth.”  
At this point, the heavens begin to take root.

After another 5,400 years, the **Zi period** fully unfolds. The light and clear ascend, forming the sun, moon, stars, and celestial bodies—what are called the Four Signs. Thus, it is said, “The heavens opened in Zi.” Another 5,400 years see the **Zi period** lead into the **Chou period**, when solidity emerges. The *Book of Changes* states:

“Great indeed is the creation of Heaven!  
Magnificent indeed is the grounding of Earth!  
All things are nurtured, and order is established.”  
At this juncture, the earth begins to solidify.

In the **Chou period**, the heavy and turbid sink downward, forming water, fire, mountains, stones, and soil—what are called the Five Forms. Thus, it is said, “The earth was established in Chou.” As time marches on, the **Chou period** transitions to the **Yin period**, where life begins to flourish. The *Almanac* records:

“Heaven’s energy descends,  
Earth’s energy rises.  
When heaven and earth merge,  
All living beings are born.”  
At this moment, the union of heaven and earth is complete, and yin and yang harmonize.

Another 5,400 years pass, and during the **Yin period**, humans, beasts, and birds are born. This marks the establishment of the Three Talents: heaven, earth, and humanity. Thus, it is said, “Human beings are born in Yin.”

**The Four Great Continents and the Flower-Fruit Mountain**

Thanks to Pangu’s creation of heaven and earth, the Three Sovereigns brought order to the world, and the Five Emperors defined human ethics. The world was divided into four great continents: the **Eastern Continent of Purvavideha**, the **Western Continent of Aparagodaniya**, the **Southern Continent of Jambudvipa**, and the **Northern Continent of Uttarakuru**. This story focuses solely on the **Eastern Continent of Purvavideha**.

Amidst the seas of this continent lies a land known as **Aolai Country**. Near this country is a great ocean, and within the ocean stands a mountain called **Flower-Fruit Mountain**. This mountain is the ancestor of the ten continents and the origin of the three islands, formed during the division of chaos into clear and turbid elements. Truly, it is a marvelous mountain, as evidenced by a poetic description:

Its majesty commands the vast ocean; its presence calms the jade seas.  
Waves crash against silver peaks; currents swirl through emerald valleys.  
Lofty are its cliffs, rising to touch the sky;  
Verdant are its forests, teeming with life.  
Strange flowers bloom year-round, and ancient trees remain evergreen.  
Heavenly springs flow through jade rocks; clear streams cascade down emerald slopes.  
Immortal fruits ripen in all seasons, and sacred pines are ever verdant.  
Truly, this is a paradise blessed by heaven and earth.

At the summit of this mountain stood an extraordinary rock. The stone was 36 feet 5 inches tall and 24 feet in circumference, numbers symbolizing the 365 degrees of the celestial sphere and the 24 solar terms of the year. On its surface were nine orifices and eight apertures, corresponding to the Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams. Over countless eons, this stone absorbed the essence of heaven and earth, the radiance of the sun and moon. One day, the stone split open, and from within emerged a stone egg, round like a ball. As the wind touched it, the egg transformed into a stone monkey, complete with limbs and features.

This stone monkey was no ordinary creature. As soon as it was born, it bowed to the four directions. Its golden eyes radiated beams of light that shot toward the heavens, startling the Jade Emperor, who sent his divine attendants to investigate. The watchers reported:

“This phenomenon originates from the Eastern Continent of Purvavideha, within the borders of Aolai Country. Atop Flower-Fruit Mountain, a stone has given birth to a monkey. Its golden light is extraordinary but has now subsided.”  
The Jade Emperor, unconcerned, remarked:  
“Such earthly creatures, born of heaven and earth’s essence, are of no consequence.”

**The Monkey’s Life Among the Beasts**

The stone monkey lived freely in the mountain, walking and leaping as it pleased. It drank from mountain streams, ate wild fruits, and played with wolves, tigers, and deer. At night, it slept beneath stone cliffs; by day, it roamed through the peaks and forests. In this carefree existence, the passage of time was unnoticed:

“In the mountains, there is no calendar; the years pass unnoticed.”

One day, during the heat of summer, the monkeys sought refuge in the shade of a pine grove. As they played, they noticed a waterfall cascading down the mountain. Inspired, they decided to explore its source. They declared:

“Whoever dares to leap through the waterfall and return unharmed shall be our king!”

The stone monkey volunteered. With a leap, it passed through the cascading waters and discovered a hidden paradise—a cave dwelling with a stone bridge, stone furniture, and an inscription that read: **“The Blessed Land of Flower-Fruit Mountain, the Heaven of the Water-Curtain Cave.”** Overjoyed, the stone monkey returned to the others, who crowned it their king, naming it the **Handsome Monkey King**.

Thus began the reign of the Monkey King over his subjects, leading them in a life of joy and freedom. Yet, as time passed, the Monkey King began to ponder the inevitability of death and resolved to seek the secret of immortality. This decision set him on the path of adventure, leading him to leave Flower-Fruit Mountain in search of enlightenment.

**The Monkey King’s Quest for Immortality**

Once the Handsome Monkey King became the leader of the monkeys, he lived carefree on the Flower-Fruit Mountain, enjoying the admiration of his subjects. They called him “Great King” and followed his every command. Yet, as time passed, the Monkey King began to notice the natural cycle of life and death. One evening, during a feast with his monkey subjects, the thought of mortality disturbed him deeply. He began to weep, and the other monkeys asked, "Great King, why are you crying?"

The Monkey King replied, “Though we are happy now, there will come a day when we grow old, fall ill, and die. Isn’t this the greatest tragedy of life?”

The monkeys laughed and said, “Great King, this is the way of the world. There is nothing we can do to change it.”

But the Monkey King, resolute and ambitious, declared, “No! I refuse to accept this fate. There must be a way to escape death.”

Having made up his mind, he asked his companions, “Do you know of anyone in this world who is free from the cycle of birth and death?”

One elderly monkey stepped forward and said, “Legends tell of sages and immortals who have transcended the mortal world. They possess the secrets of longevity and enlightenment.”

The Monkey King exclaimed, “If such beings exist, then I must find them! I will leave this mountain and search for the secret of immortality.”

The monkeys, saddened to hear this, tried to dissuade him, saying, “Great King, you have everything you could possibly want here—why leave us for an uncertain journey?”

But the Monkey King was determined. “Even if it takes me a lifetime, I will find the Way to immortality and return to share it with you all.”

Thus, after a great farewell feast, the Handsome Monkey King bid his subjects goodbye. At dawn the next day, he left Flower-Fruit Mountain and set off on his journey.

**The Monkey King Enters the World of Humans**

Having left the mountain, the Monkey King wandered across mountains and rivers, traveling through forests and valleys. He survived by foraging for wild fruits and drinking from streams. He journeyed far and wide, searching for someone who could teach him the secret to eternal life.

One day, he arrived at the edge of the great ocean. Gazing at the endless waves, he realized he could not cross it on his own. Seeing no other choice, he built a raft from logs and bamboo, and with great effort, paddled across the sea. Days and nights passed, and finally, he spotted land on the horizon.

Reaching the shore, the Monkey King found himself in the world of humans. For the first time, he saw villages, towns, and cities bustling with people. Curious and eager to learn, he disguised himself as a human by wearing clothes he found along the way. He observed the ways of humanity, marveling at their customs, their homes, and their wisdom.

Yet, despite the wonders of human civilization, he found no one who could teach him the secret of immortality. Most people were preoccupied with mundane concerns and had no knowledge of the Dao, the great Way. Frustrated but undeterred, he continued his search, traveling from place to place and asking everyone he met about sages and immortals.

**The Monkey King Finds His Master**

After many years of wandering, the Monkey King finally heard rumors of a great immortal who lived deep in the mountains. This immortal was said to possess profound wisdom and mastery of the Dao. Determined, the Monkey King traveled to the location described in the rumors—a secluded mountain called the **Mountain of the Spirit and the Heart (Lingshan)**.

There, he discovered a hidden grove and followed a path that led to a cave dwelling. At its entrance, he saw an inscription that read:

**“Cave of the Slanting Moon and Three Stars.”**

The Monkey King stepped inside and found himself in the presence of an immortal sage. The sage was seated on a dais, surrounded by disciples. His appearance was extraordinary—his face radiant, his eyes gleaming with wisdom, and his demeanor calm and commanding. The Monkey King immediately bowed low and said, “Master, I have traveled far and wide in search of the Way. Please, accept me as your disciple and teach me the secrets of immortality.”

The immortal sage was none other than **Patriarch Subhuti (Xuputi)**, an enlightened being well-versed in the mysteries of the Dao. Seeing the Monkey King’s sincerity, he asked, “What is your name, and where are you from?”

The Monkey King replied, “I have no parents, no name, and no home. I was born from a stone atop Flower-Fruit Mountain. I have come here to seek the Way.”

The patriarch smiled and said, “If you are truly sincere, I will teach you. But first, you must prove your dedication. Are you willing to endure hardship and follow my instructions without question?”

The Monkey King, overjoyed, knelt and vowed, “Master, I will do whatever it takes to learn the Way.”

Thus, the Monkey King became a disciple of Patriarch Subhuti. The patriarch gave him a new name: **Sun Wukong (孫悟空)**, which means “Awakened to Emptiness.” This name symbolized the Monkey King’s potential to transcend illusion and achieve enlightenment.

**Chapter 7: The Great Sage Escapes the Eight Trigrams Furnace and Is Subdued Beneath the Five Elements Mountain**

**Fame and fortune are predestined; do not deceive yourself.  
Act with integrity and kindness, and reap the fruits of goodness.  
Arrogance invites the wrath of Heaven;  
Though your time has not yet come, misfortune lies in wait.  
Why does the East shine brightly yet invite calamity?  
It is the fault of ambition, striving beyond the limits of Heaven.**

The **Great Sage Equal to Heaven** was captured by the celestial army and taken to the Demon Execution Platform. Bound to the Exorcism Pillar, he endured countless blows—axes, swords, spears, and halberds—but none could harm him. The Southern Dipper Star Lord commanded the gods of the Fire Division to burn him with divine flames, yet the fire did not even singe his fur. The gods of the Thunder Division then struck him with lightning, but still, he remained unscathed.

The **Demon Kings** assembled and reported to the Jade Emperor:  
"Your Majesty, we do not know where this Great Sage learned his invulnerable body techniques. We've tried chopping, burning, and striking him with lightning, but none of it works. What shall we do?"

The Jade Emperor grew concerned. "If this creature cannot be harmed, how can he be dealt with?"

Then **Taishang Laojun** [the Supreme Elder Lord] stepped forward and advised:  
"This monkey ate the peaches of immortality, drank the royal wine, and stole my elixirs. He consumed all five gourds of my pills—both raw and refined. These elixirs, forged over countless years, have infused his body with the essence of spiritual fire, rendering him impervious to harm. I suggest that Your Majesty entrust him to me. I will place him inside my **Eight Trigrams Furnace** and use both civil and martial flames to refine him. Not only will I recover the elixirs from his body, but he will also be reduced to ashes."

The Jade Emperor consented and ordered the celestial generals to deliver the Great Sage to Taishang Laojun. At the same time, the Jade Emperor rewarded **Erlang Shen** for his efforts in subduing the Great Sage, gifting him a hundred golden flowers, a hundred bottles of celestial wine, a hundred elixirs, rare treasures, and fine silks, to be shared with his sworn brothers. Erlang Shen expressed his gratitude and returned to his post at **Guankou (River Pass)**.

**The Great Sage in the Eight Trigrams Furnace**

Taishang Laojun took the Great Sage to his **Tusita Palace**, where he removed the chains and the instrument piercing the monkey's shoulder blades. He then shoved Sun Wukong into the Eight Trigrams Furnace and ordered his attendants to stoke the fire. The furnace was divided into eight chambers, each corresponding to one of the trigrams: Qian, Kan, Gen, Zhen, Xun, Li, Kun, and Dui. Sun Wukong chose to hide in the **Xun chamber**—the chamber of wind. Since wind feeds fire but does not ignite on its own, he was spared from the flames. However, the smoke in the chamber was intense, and it irritated his eyes, turning them blood-red and granting him the famous "Fiery Eyes and Golden Gaze."

Time passed quickly, and after **seven times seven days (49 days)**, the refinement process was complete. Taishang Laojun opened the furnace to check on the elixirs. But just as the furnace door opened, Sun Wukong rubbed his irritated eyes and leapt out in a flash. The force of his escape toppled the furnace with a loud crash. The celestial attendants tried to stop him, but he knocked them all to the ground, scattering them like leaves in a storm. Even Taishang Laojun himself was thrown headlong into the chaos as Sun Wukong escaped.

Retrieving his **golden-banded staff**, Sun Wukong enlarged it to its full size. Wielding the staff, he charged through the celestial palace, attacking indiscriminately. The **Nine Luminaries Stars** shut their doors, and the **Four Heavenly Kings** vanished without a trace. Truly, the Monkey King was a terror to behold!

**The Great Sage Wreaks Havoc in Heaven**

Poetry commemorates this scene:

**The primordial body aligns with Heaven's Way,  
Indestructible through countless eons.  
Neither fire nor water can harm it,  
Its nature is eternal and unyielding.  
Refined over centuries, it transcends the mundane,  
Its infinite transformations defy comprehension.**

Another verse says:

**A spark of divine light illuminates the void,  
The staff in his hand follows his will:  
It grows or shrinks, twists or turns,  
Yielding to no one across Heaven and Earth.**

Having escaped, Sun Wukong rampaged through **Lingxiao Palace**, driving the celestial soldiers into retreat. The **Guardian Spirit King**, stationed at the palace gates, tried to stop him. Armed with a golden whip, the guardian shouted, "Where do you think you're going, you arrogant monkey? Cease your madness!"

Sun Wukong, without a word, swung his staff. The guardian countered with his whip, and the two clashed in a fierce battle outside the palace gates. Their fight raged on, evenly matched, until the Jade Emperor summoned reinforcements. **36 Thunder Generals** were dispatched to encircle the Great Sage, surrounding him in a deadly battle formation.

But Sun Wukong was fearless. Transforming into a three-headed, six-armed form, he wielded three golden staffs, twirling them like a spinning wheel. The Thunder Generals, armed with swords, spears, axes, and halberds, could not approach him. Truly, the Great Sage was unstoppable:

**Round and radiant, his body gleamed like a gem,  
Unaffected by fire, unscathed by water.  
He could bring blessings or calamities at will,  
Walking the line between virtue and sin.**

Despite the Thunder Generals' best efforts, they could not defeat Sun Wukong. The Jade Emperor, realizing the severity of the situation, issued an urgent decree:  
"Summon the Buddha from the Western Paradise to subdue this demon!"

**The Buddha Subdues the Monkey King**

The Buddha, residing in **Thunderclap Monastery** in the Western Paradise, received the summons. Accompanied by **Ānanda** and **Kāśyapa**, he traveled to the Heavenly Court. Upon arrival, the Buddha ordered the Thunder Generals to cease their assault and called Sun Wukong forward for a challenge.

The Buddha said, "I have heard of your great power and your desire to seize the Jade Emperor's throne. Tell me, monkey, where did you come from, and what gives you the right to act so arrogantly?"

Sun Wukong replied:  
"I was born from a stone on Flower-Fruit Mountain. I mastered the secrets of immortality and gained unparalleled strength. The Jade Emperor's reign has lasted long enough—it's time for a new ruler. Why shouldn't I sit on the heavenly throne?"

The Buddha smiled. "If you are so powerful, let us make a wager. If you can leap out of the palm of my hand, the throne shall be yours. But if you fail, you must return to Earth and cease your rebellion."

Sun Wukong laughed. "How foolish! A single somersault of mine covers 108,000 li. Escaping your palm will be child's play!"

**The Monkey King’s Defeat**

Sun Wukong leapt into the air, somersaulting into the clouds. After traveling what seemed like an infinite distance, he arrived at five towering pillars. Thinking he had reached the edge of the universe, he marked his victory by carving his name into one of the pillars and urinating at its base. Satisfied, he returned to the Buddha’s palm, boasting, "I have won! The universe is mine!"

The Buddha chuckled and showed Sun Wukong his palm, where the monkey saw his name carved and smelled the stench of his own urine. Realizing he had never left the Buddha’s hand, Sun Wukong was stunned. Before he could react, the Buddha flipped his palm and pressed him beneath a mountain formed from his five fingers, representing the **Five Elements** (gold, wood, water, fire, and earth).

Thus, Sun Wukong was trapped beneath the **Five Elements Mountain**, unable to escape. The Buddha decreed that he would remain there until a holy monk came to guide him on the path to enlightenment.

**The "Heaven-Pacifying Banquet"**

After the Buddha subdued Sun Wukong and sealed him beneath the **Five Elements Mountain**, the celestial court rejoiced. The Buddha, accompanied by the two disciples **Ānanda** and **Kāśyapa**, prepared to return to the Western Paradise. Just as he was about to depart, a celestial officer rushed forward to report:

“The Jade Emperor is on his way to personally thank you, and he requests that you stay briefly.”

Hearing this, the Buddha paused and turned to see the arrival of the Jade Emperor’s grand procession—adorned with **eight-paned phoenix carriages**, **nine-layered jeweled canopies**, and accompanied by celestial music and divine fragrances. The Jade Emperor dismounted and approached the Buddha, bowing deeply in gratitude:

“Many thanks to the Great Buddha for subduing the rebellious demon and restoring peace to Heaven. To show my gratitude, I wish to host a grand banquet in your honor and invite all celestial beings to join me in celebration.”

The Buddha clasped his hands together and humbly replied, “Your Majesty, it is not my power alone that subdued the demon, but the collective virtue and blessings of all the gods. If this humble monk can be of service, I am honored to oblige.”

The Jade Emperor immediately ordered the **Cloud Department gods** to send invitations to all the celestial beings, including the **Three Pure Ones** (Sanqing), **Four Heavenly Emperors**, **Five Elders**, **Six Divisions**, **Seven Primordial Saints**, **Eight Extremities**, **Nine Stars**, **Ten Capitals**, and countless other immortals and sages. He commanded a grand hall to be prepared in the **Jade Capital Palace**, decorated with **dragon liver, phoenix marrow**, **immortal nectar**, and **peaches of longevity**.

**The Feast Begins**

Soon, the immortals arrived in droves, each bearing gifts of rare treasures and divine fruits. Among them were the **Primordial Celestial of the Heavenly Origin**, the **Celestial Worthy of the Numinous Treasure**, the **Supreme Celestial of the Dao and Its Virtue**, the **Lord of the Five Qi**, the **Star Lords of the Five Constellations**, the **Three Officials**, the **Nine Luminaries**, and many others. Each brought dazzling offerings: luminous pearls, precious relics, immortal fruits, and celestial flowers. They all bowed to the Buddha and declared in unison:

“Grateful are we for the Buddha’s boundless power, which subdued the rebellious monkey and safeguarded Heaven’s peace. In honor of your achievement, we humbly join this banquet of gratitude.”

The Buddha smiled and said, “All of you are too kind. This gathering is the Jade Emperor’s merit, and I am but a humble monk grateful to be of service.”

The immortals then requested that the Buddha name the banquet. After a moment of reflection, the Buddha announced:

“Let this banquet be called the **Heaven-Pacifying Banquet** (安天大会), for it celebrates the restoration of order and harmony in the celestial realm.”

Everyone praised the name, proclaiming, “An excellent name! A most fitting name!”

**The Queen Mother’s Contribution**

As the banquet reached its peak, **the Queen Mother of the West** arrived, leading a procession of celestial maidens, nymphs, and goddesses. She carried with her a gift of several **immortal peaches**, hand-picked from her **Peach Orchard of Longevity**. Bowing before the Buddha, she said:

“Some time ago, the rebellious monkey caused chaos in my orchard and disrupted the Peach Banquet. Thanks to the Buddha’s intervention, peace has been restored. I bring these peaches to commemorate this joyous occasion and to express my gratitude.”

The peaches were extraordinary: half-red and half-green, radiating a sweet fragrance that filled the hall. Their beauty was unparalleled, and their power to extend life was unmatched. A poem describes them as follows:

**Half-red, half-green, exuding divine fragrance,  
Rare treasures of Heaven, their roots eternal.  
Even the peaches of the mortal world,  
Cannot compare to these celestial wonders.  
With a single bite, one’s lifespan extends,  
Granting vitality and immortality to the blessed.**

The Buddha accepted the gift with gratitude, and the Queen Mother instructed her attendants to perform dances and songs in celebration. The celestial maidens sang heavenly melodies and danced with graceful movements, enchanting the entire hall. The immortals clapped and cheered, praising the joyous atmosphere of the banquet.

**The Arrival of the Star of Longevity**

As the festivities continued, a sudden wave of fragrant air swept through the hall, and all the immortals looked up to see **the Star of Longevity** descending from the heavens. He carried with him a jade plate of **purple lingzhi mushrooms** and a gourd containing **golden elixirs**. Bowing before the Buddha, he said:

“Upon hearing of the Buddha’s great accomplishment in subduing the rebellious monkey, I have come to offer my humble gifts. These lingzhi mushrooms and golden elixirs are treasures of longevity, meant to honor your boundless virtue.”

A poem describes the Star of Longevity’s arrival:

**A fragrant breeze heralds his approach,  
The heavens rejoice at his presence.  
In his hands, treasures of life eternal,  
Symbols of peace and harmony restored.  
The Star of Longevity, ageless and wise,  
Brings blessings to the celestial court.**

The Buddha accepted the gifts, and the Star of Longevity was seated among the honored guests.

**The Red-Footed Immortal**

Soon after, **the Red-Footed Immortal** arrived, carrying a tray of **celestial pears** and **fire dates**. He bowed to the Buddha and said:

“Your great power has subdued the rebellious monkey and restored peace to Heaven. I bring these fruits as a token of my respect and gratitude.”

A poem describes the offering:

**Red-footed Immortal with gifts divine,  
Celestial pears and dates sublime.  
Their fragrance fills the banquet hall,  
Blessings bestowed upon one and all.  
With these fruits, the Buddha’s virtue praised,  
In Heaven’s harmony, all are raised.**

The Buddha thanked him, and the fruits were added to the table of offerings.

**Securing the Seal on the Five Elements Mountain**

As the banquet continued, a celestial officer entered the hall and reported:  
“The rebellious monkey, though subdued beneath the mountain, has attempted to stir. His head has emerged from the rocks.”

The Buddha calmly replied, “Do not be alarmed.” He drew a piece of paper from his sleeve and inscribed six golden characters upon it: **“Om Ma Ni Pad Me Hum”** (唵嘛呢叭〔口迷〕吽). Handing the paper to **Ānanda**, he instructed, “Take this to the peak of the mountain and affix it there.”

Ānanda departed at once, flying swiftly to the **Five Elements Mountain**, where he placed the inscription on a square stone at the summit. The mountain instantly fused together, sealing Sun Wukong completely. Though the monkey could breathe and move slightly, he was unable to escape. Ānanda returned and reported, “The seal has been secured.”

**A New Guardian for the Mountain**

The Buddha, filled with compassion, recited a spell and summoned a local **Earth God** and the **Five Directional Deities** to oversee the mountain. He instructed them:  
“This rebellious monkey is to remain here as punishment for his crimes. When he is thirsty, give him molten copper to drink. When he is hungry, feed him iron pellets. He will remain here until his punishment is complete, at which time someone destined to guide him to salvation will come.”

A poem reflects the Buddha’s decree:

**A monkey’s rebellion shakes the heavens,  
Yet the Buddha’s palm brings him low.  
Molten copper to quench his thirst,  
Iron pellets to sustain his life.  
Though bound beneath the mountain’s weight,  
The seeds of redemption quietly grow.**

With the monkey subdued, the Buddha returned to the Western Paradise, leaving the celestial court to continue their celebrations. The chapter ends with a prophecy:

**When the time is right, a holy monk from the Tang Dynasty will appear,  
And the rebellious monkey shall embark on a journey to enlightenment.**

**Chapter 15: The Gods Aid in Secret on Snake-Coil Mountain; The Dragon-Horse Appears at Eagle-Sorrow Gorge**

The story continues as the Monkey King (Sun Wukong) escorts his master, Tang Sanzang, westward. After traveling for several days, they find themselves in the cold depths of winter, with biting northern winds and slippery, icy paths. Their journey takes them over treacherous cliffs and rugged mountain trails. Tang Sanzang rides his horse and hears the sound of rushing water in the distance. He turns and asks, "Wukong, what is that sound of water?"

Wukong replies, “If I recall correctly, this place is called Snake-Coil Mountain and Eagle-Sorrow Gorge. The sound must be coming from the stream in the gorge.”

As they approach the gorge, Tang Sanzang reins in his horse to observe. Before them lies a stunning scene:

*A cold stream flows through the clouds,  
Reflecting the red sun in its azure waves.  
The sound echoes through the valleys at night,  
Colors shimmer like sunrise in the vast sky.  
Waves leap high, scattering jade-like foam,  
The clear waters roar with the wind's song.  
Flowing away to join the great misty expanse,  
Where gulls and herons vanish without a trace.*

While the master and disciple admire the view, a sudden roar erupts from the gorge. From the water leaps a dragon, sending waves crashing against the cliffs. The dragon charges directly at Tang Sanzang. Startled, Wukong drops their luggage, grabs his master off the horse, and retreats. The dragon, unable to catch them, swallows Tang Sanzang’s white horse — saddle, bridle, and all — before diving back into the depths and vanishing.

Wukong seats Tang Sanzang on a high ridge, then returns to check on their remaining belongings. He finds only their luggage and no trace of the horse. Carrying the luggage back to Tang Sanzang, he reports, "Master, that evil dragon has disappeared, but it took our horse."

Tang Sanzang laments, "Disciple, how will we continue our journey without the horse?"

Wukong reassures him, "Don’t worry, Master. Let me go investigate."

He whistles and leaps into the air, using his fiery eyes to scan the surroundings. After surveying the area, he returns and reports, "Master, our horse is definitely in the dragon’s stomach. I’ve searched everywhere, and there’s no trace of it."

Tang Sanzang replies, "Disciple, is it truly possible for the dragon to have swallowed such a large horse, saddle and all? Perhaps the horse was merely spooked and ran into one of these mountain recesses. Look again."

Wukong, annoyed, exclaims, "You underestimate my abilities! My eyes can see a thousand miles in daylight. I could spot a dragonfly's wings within that range. How could I miss a horse?"

Tang Sanzang, despairing, says, "If the horse is gone, how can we proceed? These endless mountains and rivers — how will we ever cross them on foot?" He begins to cry.

Wukong, frustrated by his master’s tears, shouts, "Stop crying! Sit tight, and I’ll go find that beast and make it return the horse!"

Tang Sanzang grabs his arm and pleads, "Disciple, don’t go! If the dragon ambushes us, we’ll both be lost. Without man or horse, what then?"

Wukong, angered, roars, "You’re too indecisive! You want the horse, but you won’t let me retrieve it. Should we just sit here with our luggage until we grow old?"

As Wukong fumes, a voice suddenly speaks from the air: "Great Sage Sun, do not be angry. Tang Sanzang, do not cry. We are gods sent by Guanyin Bodhisattva to secretly protect the pilgrim on his journey."

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang quickly kneels in gratitude. Wukong demands, "Who are you? State your names so I can keep track."

The gods reply, "We are the Six Ding, Six Jia, the Five Directions’ Deities, the Four Duty Officers, and the eighteen Vajra Guardians. We take turns protecting the pilgrims each day."

Wukong asks, "Who is on duty today?"

The deity in charge replies, "Today, the Six Ding Generals, the Duty Officer, and the Five Directions’ Deities are stationed here. The Golden-Headed Deity remains by your side at all times."

Wukong commands, "The rest of you may leave. Those on duty, stay and guard my master while I go deal with the dragon and retrieve our horse."

The gods obey. Tang Sanzang, comforted, sits on a stone ledge. Wukong reassures him, "Master, rest easy."

The Monkey King, full of vigor, adjusts his tiger-skin skirt, grabs his iron staff, and marches toward the gorge. Standing on the water’s surface, he bellows, "You slimy eel! Return my horse! Return it now!"

Meanwhile, the dragon, resting at the bottom of the gorge after swallowing the horse, hears Wukong’s insults. Unable to contain his anger, he leaps out of the water, creating waves as he rises. He confronts Wukong, roaring, "Who dares to insult me here?"

Wukong shouts back, "Stop running! Return my horse!" He swings his staff at the dragon’s head. The dragon retaliates with claws and teeth. The two battle fiercely by the gorge.

The scene is chaotic:

*The dragon extends sharp claws;  
The monkey swings his golden staff.  
The dragon’s whiskers glisten like threads of jade;  
The monkey’s armor shines like a golden flame.  
One spits pearls, creating mist and rain;  
The other spins his staff, summoning fierce winds.  
Both are creatures of extraordinary power,  
Battling with skill and ferocity.*

The fight rages on for some time, but the dragon grows weary and retreats back into the water, refusing to emerge. Wukong, unable to lure him out, returns to Tang Sanzang and reports, "Master, the dragon came out and fought me but fled after a while. Now it’s hiding in the water and won’t come out."

Tang Sanzang asks, "Are you certain it’s the one that ate my horse?"

Wukong retorts, "Of course! If it hadn’t eaten the horse, would it have come out to fight me?"

Tang Sanzang presses, "You once claimed to have the power to subdue dragons and tigers. Why can't you defeat this dragon today?"

Wukong, irritated by his master’s criticism, responds, "Don’t rush me! I’ll deal with him properly this time."

The Monkey King returns to the gorge and uses his magical powers to stir the waters. He churns the gorge until the waves rise like a flooding river. The dragon, deep in the gorge, feels the disturbance and thinks, "Misfortune upon misfortune! I escaped death once already, and now this troublemaker seeks to destroy me!" Overwhelmed with rage, the dragon leaps out again and curses, "You accursed demon! How dare you torment me?"

Wukong replies, "Don’t waste words. Return the horse, and I’ll spare your life!"

The dragon refuses. "I’ve swallowed your horse! It’s impossible to return it. Do your worst!"

"Fine!" Wukong shouts. "If you won’t return the horse, my staff will settle the score!"

They battle again, but after a few strikes, the dragon, realizing he’s no match, transforms into a water snake and hides among the reeds. Wukong searches but finds no trace of him.

Enraged, Wukong summons the local land deity and mountain spirit. When they appear, trembling, Wukong demands, "Tell me, who is this dragon? Why did he eat my master’s horse?"

The land deity explains, "Great Sage, this dragon is no ordinary creature. Guanyin Bodhisattva once saved him and assigned him here to assist the pilgrim. However, it seems he acted out of ignorance and caused this trouble."

Wukong, hearing this, decides to seek Guanyin’s assistance. He orders the Golden-Headed Deity to fetch her.

Guanyin arrives and subdues the dragon, transforming him into a strong, magnificent horse. She assures Wukong, "This dragon is destined to carry your master across mountains and rivers. With him, your journey will be smoother."

Reluctantly, Wukong accepts the dragon-horse. With their new companion, the pilgrims continue westward, facing new challenges and adventures.

When Guanyin Bodhisattva appeared at the scene, she was accompanied by her disciple Hui’an. Seeing Wukong and hearing his complaint, Guanyin smiled and said, “Great Sage Sun, you need not be angry. This dragon was originally the third son of the Dragon King of the Western Ocean. Due to his misdeeds, he was sentenced to death by the Jade Emperor. I intervened and saved him, placing him here to await his role in assisting the pilgrimage. However, it seems he has acted out of ignorance and caused trouble.”

Wukong, still fuming, replied, “If this was all preordained, why did he swallow my master’s horse? How are we supposed to continue the journey now?”

Guanyin responded with a smile, “Do not worry. I will personally handle this matter.”

She raised her willow branch, dipped it in the pure water of her vase, and called out, “Ao Lie! Come before me at once!”

Hearing the Bodhisattva’s command, the dragon, trembling with fear, emerged from the water. He transformed into his true form—a majestic dragon with shimmering scales and glowing eyes—and bowed before Guanyin. “Bodhisattva, forgive me! I was overcome by hunger and swallowed the horse. I have realized my mistake.”

Guanyin sternly reprimanded him, “Ao Lie, you were spared by me and given this sacred duty. Yet you have caused offense to the pilgrims. How can you justify such behavior?”

The dragon prostrated himself and pleaded, “Bodhisattva, I truly regret my actions. Please have mercy and grant me another chance.”

Guanyin turned to Wukong and said, “Great Sage, this dragon will take responsibility for his actions. He shall transform into a white horse to carry your master on the pilgrimage. This will ensure your journey continues smoothly.”

Wukong, still unsatisfied, muttered, “Transforming him into a horse is fine, but what about the horse he already ate? That one had a saddle, reins, and everything. Are we supposed to just leave it at that?”

Guanyin replied, “The dragon will transform into a horse more magnificent than the one he swallowed, and I will ensure that the saddle and reins are restored so that no harm comes to your master’s journey.”

Hearing this, Wukong finally relented. Guanyin then turned to Ao Lie and commanded, “From this moment forth, you shall take the form of a white dragon-horse and serve Tang Sanzang on his pilgrimage to the West. You must be diligent, loyal, and never stray from your duties.”

Ao Lie nodded obediently and immediately transformed. His dragon body shimmered and shrank until he took the form of a tall, muscular white steed, with a glossy coat as radiant as fresh snow. His eyes retained a hint of a dragon’s majesty, and his hooves seemed to glow faintly with divine energy.

Guanyin waved her willow branch again, and the saddle, reins, and other gear that had been swallowed were miraculously restored, now fitted perfectly on the new dragon-horse.

Turning to Tang Sanzang, Guanyin said, “Master, this horse will carry you across the mountains and rivers of your journey. Do not worry about its strength or endurance—it will serve you faithfully.”

Tang Sanzang knelt and bowed deeply to Guanyin, saying, “Bodhisattva, your compassion is boundless. I am eternally grateful.”

Guanyin then addressed Wukong, “Great Sage, I entrust you with protecting your master and ensuring the success of this sacred mission. Do not let petty grievances delay your progress.”

Wukong bowed and said, “Understood, Bodhisattva. I will take good care of my master and make sure the journey continues without further trouble.”

With her task completed, Guanyin returned to the Southern Sea, leaving the pilgrims to resume their journey.

As the group set off again, Tang Sanzang was overjoyed to have a new horse. He mounted the dragon-horse, which moved with an elegance and speed far surpassing that of an ordinary steed. Wukong carried their luggage, grumbling to himself as they traveled.

“Master,” Wukong said, “this new horse may look impressive, but it’s still that gluttonous dragon from before. You’d better keep an eye on him in case he decides to eat something else.”

Tang Sanzang replied, “Disciple, you mustn’t speak so harshly. The Bodhisattva has already given her blessing, and this horse will surely be a great help to us.”

Wukong snorted, “Fine, fine. But don’t come crying to me if he causes trouble again.”

The group continued westward, climbing mountains and crossing rivers. After traveling for many miles, they came to the foot of another mountain. Tang Sanzang looked up and saw that the peaks were shrouded in mist, and the path ahead was steep and narrow.

“Wukong,” Tang Sanzang said, “what is this place? It looks even more treacherous than the last mountain.”

Wukong leapt into the air and scanned the area with his fiery eyes. He spotted a narrow path winding through the cliffs and valleys and said, “Master, this is the Mountain of Infinite Clouds. The path ahead is dangerous, but we can make it through if we’re careful. Stay close behind me, and I’ll lead the way.”

Tang Sanzang nodded and urged the dragon-horse forward. As they climbed the mountain, the air grew colder, and the wind howled through the cliffs, carrying the cries of unknown creatures.

Suddenly, Wukong stopped and sniffed the air. “Something’s not right,” he said. “I smell demons nearby.”

Tang Sanzang grew pale and asked, “Disciple, what should we do? Are they dangerous?”

Wukong grinned and twirled his staff. “Master, don’t worry. I’ll take care of them. Stay here with the horse while I scout ahead.”

He leapt forward, disappearing into the mist. Moments later, a loud roar echoed through the mountains, followed by the sound of a fierce battle. Wukong’s voice rang out, shouting insults and threats as he fought the demons blocking their path.

**The Dragon-Horse Joins the Pilgrimage**

After Guanyin Bodhisattva departed, Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, and the newly transformed dragon-horse resumed their westward journey. The dragon-horse, now a faithful steed, carried Tang Sanzang with great ease, its strides smooth and steady, as if gliding over the rough mountain paths. Sun Wukong followed behind, carrying their luggage, his iron staff slung across his back, and his ears perked for any signs of trouble.

The group traveled for several days without incident, crossing rivers and climbing hills, until they reached the foot of another mountain. Looking up, Tang Sanzang saw towering peaks shrouded in mist, with dense forests covering the slopes. The mountain seemed vast and endless, its trails narrow and precarious.

Tang Sanzang reined in the dragon-horse and asked, “Wukong, what mountain is this? It looks even more dangerous than Snake-Coil Mountain.”

Wukong leaped into the air, somersaulting to the top of a tall tree. From this vantage point, he scanned the terrain carefully, using his fiery eyes to pierce through the mist. After a moment, he descended and said, “Master, this is Cloud-Stack Mountain, and it looks like we’ll have trouble here. I can already sense demonic energy nearby. There’s bound to be some fiends lying in wait to ambush us.”

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang grew pale with fear. “Disciple,” he said, “what should we do if demons attack? I have no way to defend myself.”

Wukong grinned and said, “Master, you’ve got me! Don’t worry. If any demons dare to show themselves, I’ll smash them with my staff before they can so much as blink. Just stay close to me and don’t wander off.”

Tang Sanzang nodded, but his heart was still heavy with worry as they began to climb the mountain. The narrow trail wound upward through dense forest, the trees so tall and thick that they blocked out the sunlight. The air was cold and damp, and the only sounds were the rustling of leaves and the occasional cry of distant birds.

As they ascended, Wukong’s sharp senses remained on high alert. Suddenly, he stopped and sniffed the air. His face darkened. “Master,” he said, “there’s definitely a demon nearby. I can smell its stench.”

Tang Sanzang trembled and asked, “What should we do? Should we turn back?”

Wukong laughed and said, “Turn back? Why would we do that? Just stay here with the horse while I go take care of the problem.”

Tang Sanzang dismounted and sat down on a rock, his hands clasped in prayer, while Wukong dashed ahead. After running for a short distance, Wukong spotted a large cave entrance hidden among the trees. The ground around the cave was littered with bones, and the air reeked of blood. Wukong’s fiery eyes gleamed as he muttered to himself, “So this is where the demon lives. Let’s see what kind of creature it is.”

He transformed himself into a buzzing fly and flew into the cave, where he found a demon seated on a stone throne. The demon was enormous, with a face like a yak, eyes like burning coals, and sharp fangs that jutted out of its mouth. It wore armor made of black iron and held a massive spiked mace in one hand.

The demon was surrounded by smaller fiends, who were busy preparing food and sharpening weapons. Hanging from the walls of the cave were chains and cages, some of which still held the remains of unlucky travelers who had fallen into the demon’s clutches.

The demon roared with laughter and said, “Brothers, today is a lucky day! I just smelled the scent of a holy monk passing through the mountain. If we capture him and eat his flesh, we’ll gain immortality! Prepare to attack!”

The smaller fiends cheered and began arming themselves. Hearing this, Wukong’s blood boiled with rage. He flew out of the cave, returned to his true form, and dashed back to Tang Sanzang.

“Master,” he said, “there’s a demon ahead, and it plans to attack us. Stay here with the horse while I go deal with it.”

Tang Sanzang, terrified, said, “Disciple, be careful! Demons are cunning and dangerous. Don’t act recklessly.”

Wukong smirked and said, “Master, you underestimate me. That demon won’t last three strikes against my staff.”

With that, he somersaulted back to the cave, where the demon and its minions were preparing to set out. Wukong stood boldly at the entrance, his iron staff resting on his shoulder, and shouted, “Hey, you ugly beast! Come out here and face me!”

The demon, startled, rushed out of the cave and saw Wukong standing there. “Who are you?” the demon roared. “How dare you insult me!”

Wukong laughed and said, “I’m the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, Sun Wukong! I’ve come to teach you a lesson for daring to threaten my master.”

The demon snarled and swung its spiked mace at Wukong’s head. Wukong leaped into the air, dodging the blow, and countered with a strike from his staff. The two clashed fiercely, their blows shaking the ground and sending sparks flying.

*The demon roared like thunder,  
Wukong’s laughter echoed through the hills.  
One wielded a mace with the strength of a mountain,  
The other swung his staff with the speed of the wind.  
Rocks shattered, trees fell,  
The clash of iron rang out like a storm.*

The battle raged for over thirty rounds, but the demon began to tire. Wukong, seeing his opportunity, struck the demon’s mace with his staff, sending it flying. He then delivered a powerful blow to the demon’s head, knocking it to the ground.

The smaller fiends, seeing their leader defeated, scattered in all directions. Wukong grabbed the demon by the collar and said, “Speak! Who are you, and why are you here?”

The demon, groaning in pain, replied, “I am the Yellow-Headed Demon King. I’ve lived on this mountain for years, preying on travelers and eating their flesh. Please spare my life!”

Wukong snorted and said, “Spare your life? After all the harm you’ve caused? Not a chance!” He raised his staff to finish the demon off, but at that moment, the local mountain deity appeared and knelt before Wukong.

“Great Sage,” the mountain deity said, “please show mercy. This demon was sent here as part of your master’s trials. If you kill it, it will disrupt the heavenly mandate.”

Wukong frowned and said, “So I’m supposed to let it go? What if it causes trouble again?”

The mountain deity replied, “You can subdue it and bind it with a spell, ensuring that it won’t harm anyone in the future.”

Reluctantly, Wukong agreed. Using a spell, he bound the Yellow-Headed Demon King and handed it over to the mountain deity for safekeeping. Then he returned to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, the demon has been dealt with. We can continue our journey.”

Tang Sanzang thanked Wukong and mounted the dragon-horse once more. Together, they continued westward, ready to face the next challenge on their sacred quest.

**Continuing the Journey After the Demon’s Defeat**

With the Yellow-Headed Demon King subdued and handed over to the mountain deity, Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, and the dragon-horse resumed their trek up Cloud-Stack Mountain. The narrow trail wound higher and higher, and the dense mist made it difficult to see more than a few feet ahead. Tang Sanzang, riding the dragon-horse, clasped his prayer beads and chanted scriptures under his breath, while Wukong led the way, his iron staff resting casually on his shoulder.

“Master,” said Wukong, turning back, “you can stop your chanting. That demon’s been taken care of—there’s no need to keep praying like it’s the end of the world.”

Tang Sanzang replied, “Disciple, you may have great power, but I still rely on the Buddha’s protection to keep us safe. This journey is fraught with dangers, and I dare not grow complacent.”

Wukong snorted. “Hmph! With me around, what danger could there possibly be? I could handle ten, twenty, even a hundred demons without breaking a sweat.”

As they climbed higher, the trail grew steeper and more treacherous. The dragon-horse stepped carefully, its hooves clicking against the rocky path, while Wukong bounded ahead, scouting for potential threats. After traveling for several miles, they finally reached the summit of the mountain and began their descent on the other side.

The scenery gradually changed as they descended. The mist lifted, revealing a lush valley below, filled with green fields, clear streams, and blooming wildflowers. Tang Sanzang sighed with relief and said, “Disciple, this place is so peaceful. Perhaps we’ve left the dangers of the mountain behind.”

Wukong, however, remained wary. “Master, don’t let appearances deceive you. Even the most beautiful places can hide deadly traps. Stay alert.”

As they made their way down into the valley, they came across a small stream. The clear water sparkled in the sunlight, and the sound of its gentle flow was soothing to the ears. Tang Sanzang dismounted and said, “Disciple, let us stop here for a moment. I’d like to rest and recite a few prayers.”

Wukong shrugged and said, “Fine, but don’t take too long. We’ve got a long way to go.”

Tang Sanzang sat on a rock by the stream, while the dragon-horse drank from the water. Wukong stood nearby, twirling his staff absentmindedly and scanning the area for any signs of danger. For a while, all was quiet.

Suddenly, Wukong’s sharp ears picked up a faint rustling sound coming from the nearby bushes. His fiery eyes narrowed as he focused on the source of the noise. “Master,” he said, his voice low, “something’s not right. Stay where you are.”

Before Tang Sanzang could respond, the bushes parted, and a group of demons emerged. There were about a dozen of them, each armed with weapons—some carried swords, others spears, and a few held crude clubs. At their head was a hulking figure with a wolf’s head and a human body, its fur bristling and its eyes gleaming with malice.

“Well, well,” said the wolf demon, licking its lips. “What do we have here? A holy monk, a dragon-horse, and... a monkey? Looks like we’ve stumbled upon quite the feast!”

Wukong stepped forward, his iron staff in hand, and said, “Feast? On what? Your own corpses? You filthy beasts must have a death wish if you think you can touch my master!”

The wolf demon growled. “You insolent monkey! Do you know who I am? I’m the Great Wolf King of this valley! I’ve devoured countless travelers who dared to pass through my territory, and you’ll be no different!”

Wukong laughed. “The ‘Great Wolf King’? What a joke! I’ve fought celestial armies, subdued dragons, and wreaked havoc in Heaven itself. A mangy mutt like you doesn’t even deserve to be in the same sentence as me. Come on, then—let’s see if you can back up your big talk!”

With a roar, the Wolf King charged at Wukong, swinging its massive claws. The smaller demons followed, howling and brandishing their weapons. Wukong, grinning from ear to ear, leaped into the air and brought his staff down with a thunderous crash, sending several demons flying.

The fight was fierce:

*The Wolf King lashed out with claws like iron hooks,  
The Monkey King countered with a staff that split the heavens.  
The demons roared, their weapons flashing in the sun,  
But Wukong laughed, his strikes swift and deadly.  
Trees shook, rocks shattered,  
The valley echoed with the sounds of battle.*

Despite their numbers, the demons were no match for Wukong’s strength and skill. One by one, he knocked them to the ground, until only the Wolf King remained. The demon, realizing it was outmatched, turned to flee, but Wukong somersaulted over its head and landed in its path.

“Trying to run?” Wukong said, spinning his staff. “Not so fast!”

With a single swing of his staff, Wukong struck the Wolf King squarely on the head, killing it instantly. The remaining demons, seeing their leader defeated, scattered in all directions, their howls fading into the distance.

Wiping the sweat from his brow, Wukong returned to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, the danger has passed. We can continue on our way.”

Tang Sanzang, who had been praying fervently throughout the battle, opened his eyes and said, “Disciple, I owe my life to your bravery and skill. May the Buddha bless you.”

Wukong smirked and said, “Master, you can keep your blessings. Just don’t forget to praise me the next time you’re talking to the Buddha!”

Tang Sanzang smiled and mounted the dragon-horse once more. Together, they left the valley and continued westward, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

**The Pilgrims Encounter Another Danger**

After defeating the Wolf King and its demonic followers, Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, and the dragon-horse continued westward. The journey was peaceful for a while, but as they traveled deeper into the wilderness, the landscape began to shift. The lush greenery gave way to barren hills, and the air grew thick and oppressive, as if something sinister lurked nearby.

Tang Sanzang, sensing the change in atmosphere, grew uneasy. “Wukong,” he said, “this place feels strange. I fear there may be more demons ahead.”

Wukong, ever confident, laughed and said, “Master, don’t worry! I’ve already dealt with that mangy Wolf King, haven’t I? If any other demons dare to show their faces, I’ll smash them with my staff before they can harm you.”

Despite Wukong’s reassurances, Tang Sanzang remained anxious. As they continued, they came across a narrow gorge flanked by towering cliffs. The only way forward was a narrow path that wound through the gorge, with jagged rocks on either side.

“This path looks dangerous,” Tang Sanzang said. “Wukong, is there no other way around?”

Wukong glanced at the cliffs and said, “Master, this is the only way forward. But don’t worry—I’ll go ahead and check it out. Stay here with the horse while I make sure the path is safe.”

Tang Sanzang dismounted and sat on a rock, holding his prayer beads. The dragon-horse stood nearby, its ears twitching nervously. Wukong, gripping his iron staff, leaped into the air and somersaulted into the gorge.

As he flew through the air, Wukong’s sharp eyes scanned the area. The gorge was narrow and shadowy, with steep cliffs on either side. At the far end of the gorge, he spotted a dark cave nestled in the rocks. The air around the cave was thick with demonic energy, and Wukong’s fiery eyes gleamed as he muttered to himself, “Another demon’s lair. Let’s see what kind of creature this one is.”

He landed silently on the ground and approached the cave. From inside, he heard loud voices and the clatter of weapons. Transforming himself into a tiny insect, Wukong slipped into the cave to investigate.

Inside, he saw a group of demons gathered around a fire. They were large and brutish, with sharp fangs and glowing eyes. At the center of the group sat their leader—a fearsome demon with a bull’s head and a human body, wearing golden armor and wielding a massive axe. The Bull Demon was giving orders to his followers.

“Listen up!” the Bull Demon roared. “I’ve just heard that a holy monk is passing through this gorge. If we capture him and eat his flesh, we’ll gain immortality! Prepare an ambush! We’ll attack as soon as they enter the gorge.”

The smaller demons cheered and began sharpening their weapons. Hearing this, Wukong’s blood boiled with rage. He left the cave and returned to his true form, then dashed back to Tang Sanzang.

“Master,” he said, “there’s another demon ahead. It’s planning to ambush us in the gorge. Stay here while I go deal with it.”

Tang Sanzang, trembling with fear, said, “Disciple, be careful! Demons are cunning and dangerous. Don’t underestimate them.”

Wukong grinned and said, “Master, you’ve said that a hundred times already. Just wait here—I’ll take care of it in no time.”

With that, he somersaulted back into the gorge and stood boldly in front of the cave, banging his staff on the ground. “Hey, you bull-headed beast!” he shouted. “Come out here and face me!”

The Bull Demon, startled by the noise, emerged from the cave with his axe in hand. He towered over Wukong, his golden armor gleaming in the dim light. “Who dares disturb me?” the demon roared. “Are you tired of living?”

Wukong laughed and said, “I’m Sun Wukong, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven! I’ve come to teach you a lesson for daring to threaten my master. Come on—let’s see if you’re as tough as you look!”

Furious, the Bull Demon swung his massive axe at Wukong. Wukong leaped into the air, dodging the blow, and countered with a strike from his staff. The two clashed fiercely, their blows shaking the ground and sending sparks flying.

*The Bull Demon roared like thunder,  
Wukong’s staff struck like lightning.  
One wielded an axe with the strength of a mountain,  
The other swung his staff with the speed of the wind.  
Rocks shattered, trees fell,  
The gorge echoed with the sounds of battle.*

The fight raged on for over fifty rounds, with neither side gaining the upper hand. The Bull Demon was strong and relentless, but Wukong was quick and cunning, using his agility to outmaneuver his opponent.

Finally, the Bull Demon, realizing he couldn’t defeat Wukong, turned and fled back into the cave. Wukong chased after him, but the demon disappeared into a hidden tunnel that led deep into the cliffs.

Frustrated, Wukong returned to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, I fought the demon, but it got away. It fled into a hidden tunnel, and I couldn’t catch it.”

Tang Sanzang said, “Disciple, what should we do? If the demon is still alive, it may try to attack us again.”

Wukong frowned and said, “Don’t worry, Master. I’ll think of something. For now, let’s stick to the main path and keep moving. I’ll stay alert in case the demon tries to ambush us.”

The group continued through the gorge, with Wukong leading the way and keeping a close eye on the cliffs above. The journey was tense, but the Bull Demon did not reappear. After several miles, they reached the end of the gorge and emerged into open terrain.

Tang Sanzang sighed with relief and said, “Disciple, it seems the danger has passed. Let us continue on our way.”

Wukong, still wary, said, “Master, don’t let your guard down. Demons are tricky—they might be waiting for the right moment to strike.”

Tang Sanzang nodded, and the group pressed on. As the sun set behind the mountains, they found a clearing where they could rest for the night. Wukong gathered firewood and built a small fire, while Tang Sanzang recited scriptures and the dragon-horse grazed nearby.

That night, Wukong stayed awake, keeping watch for any signs of danger. His fiery eyes scanned the darkness, but for once, all was quiet. The stars shone brightly above, and the cool night air was filled with the sounds of rustling leaves and chirping insects.

As dawn broke, the pilgrims set out once more, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

**The Pilgrims’ Encounter with the Monster of the River**

After leaving the gorge and traveling for several days, the pilgrims came to the banks of a wide river. The river stretched as far as the eye could see, its surface shimmering under the sunlight. Its waters were swift and deep, with waves crashing against the rocky shore.

Tang Sanzang reined in the dragon-horse and said, “Wukong, this river looks dangerous. How are we supposed to cross it?”

Wukong leapt into the air and somersaulted to the top of a nearby tree. From this vantage point, he scanned the river and saw that it was indeed vast and treacherous, with no bridges or shallow crossings in sight. He landed back on the ground and said, “Master, this river is called the Flowing-Sand River. It’s over eight hundred miles wide, and its waters are filled with hidden currents. Crossing it won’t be easy.”

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang grew pale with worry. “Disciple, what should we do? If we can’t cross the river, how can we continue our journey to the West?”

Before Wukong could respond, a loud roar echoed across the river, sending ripples through the water. The sound was so powerful that it shook the ground beneath their feet. Tang Sanzang clutched his prayer beads and said, “What was that? Is it a demon?”

Wukong’s fiery eyes gleamed as he scanned the river. “Master, it’s not just any demon—it’s a water monster. Stay here while I go deal with it.”

Tang Sanzang dismounted and sat on a rock, clasping his hands in prayer. The dragon-horse stood nearby, its ears twitching nervously. Wukong, gripping his iron staff, leapt into the air and landed on the riverbank.

“Hey, you water beast!” Wukong shouted. “Come out here and face me! I’m Sun Wukong, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, and I’ve come to teach you a lesson!”

The river churned violently, and moments later, a massive figure emerged from the water. It was a fearsome monster with a human body and a beast’s face. Its eyes glowed like lanterns, and its mouth was filled with sharp fangs. Around its neck hung a string of skulls, and in its hands, it held a massive staff made of iron.

The monster roared, “Who dares disturb my river? Are you tired of living?”

Wukong laughed and said, “I’m not the one who’ll be losing my life today! You’ve been terrorizing this river for too long. It’s time for you to pay the price!”

Enraged, the monster swung its iron staff at Wukong, aiming to smash him into the ground. Wukong leapt into the air, dodging the blow, and countered with a strike from his own staff. The two clashed fiercely, their weapons ringing out like thunder.

*The river monster roared, its strength like a raging flood,  
Wukong laughed, his strikes as swift as a gale.  
Iron clashed against iron,  
The river churned, its waters rising like mountains.  
Fish scattered, waves crashed,  
The heavens and earth trembled at their battle.*

The fight raged on for over thirty rounds, with neither side gaining the upper hand. The river monster was strong and resilient, but Wukong was quick and cunning, using his agility to outmaneuver his opponent.

Finally, the monster, realizing it could not defeat Wukong, dove back into the river and disappeared beneath the surface. Wukong stood on the riverbank, fuming. “Coward! Come back and fight!”

When the monster did not reappear, Wukong returned to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, the water beast has fled. It’s hiding in the river, but I’ll find a way to deal with it.”

Tang Sanzang said, “Disciple, be careful. This monster is clearly powerful. Perhaps we should pray to the Bodhisattva for guidance.”

Wukong grumbled but agreed. Tang Sanzang knelt by the riverbank, clasped his hands, and began to chant a prayer to Guanyin Bodhisattva. Moments later, golden light filled the air, and Guanyin appeared, seated on a lotus flower, accompanied by her disciple Hui’an.

“Master of the Law,” Guanyin said, “why have you called upon me?”

Tang Sanzang bowed deeply and said, “Bodhisattva, we have come to the Flowing-Sand River on our journey to the West, but a fearsome water monster blocks our path. I humbly ask for your guidance.”

Guanyin smiled and said, “Do not worry. This monster is not your enemy, but rather another destined disciple who will assist you on your journey.”

Hearing this, Wukong exclaimed, “Another disciple? Bodhisattva, you can’t be serious! That water beast is a savage brute. How can it possibly help us?”

Guanyin replied, “This monster was once a celestial general in Heaven, but he was banished to the mortal realm for breaking a crystal goblet at the Heavenly Queen Mother’s peach banquet. Since then, he has lived in this river, repenting for his sins. However, he is fated to join your pilgrimage and atone by protecting the Master of the Law.”

Guanyin raised her willow branch and called out, “Sha Wujing! Come before me at once!”

The river churned violently, and the water monster emerged, trembling with fear. Bowing deeply, he said, “Bodhisattva, forgive me! I did not realize the holy monk was under your protection.”

Guanyin said, “Sha Wujing, your time of repentance is over. From this day forward, you shall serve Tang Sanzang as his disciple, assisting him on his journey to the West. Do you accept this duty?”

The monster prostrated himself and said, “Bodhisattva, I accept! I swear to protect the Master of the Law with my life.”

Guanyin turned to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, this is Sha Wujing. He will be your third disciple, alongside Sun Wukong and the dragon-horse. Do not fear—he will serve you faithfully.”

Tang Sanzang bowed and said, “Bodhisattva, your compassion is boundless. I am deeply grateful.”

Guanyin then turned to Wukong and said, “Great Sage, you must work together with Sha Wujing to protect your master. Put aside your grudges and focus on completing the journey.”

Wukong grumbled but nodded. “Fine, but if he causes any trouble, don’t blame me for dealing with him!”

With her task complete, Guanyin returned to the Southern Sea, leaving the pilgrims to continue their journey. Sha Wujing, now in human form, bowed to Tang Sanzang and said, “Master, I am at your service. Please allow me to carry your luggage as we travel.”

Tang Sanzang nodded, and the group set off once more. With Sha Wujing’s help, they crossed the Flowing-Sand River safely, beginning the next leg of their journey to the West.

**Sha Wujing Officially Joins the Pilgrimage**

After Guanyin Bodhisattva departed, Sha Wujing followed Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, and the dragon-horse as they made their way westward. Now formally accepted as a disciple, Sha Wujing carried Tang Sanzang’s luggage across his shoulders, and his demeanor was humble and respectful. Though his monstrous appearance had softened somewhat after his repentance, his tall and imposing figure still made him seem intimidating.

Tang Sanzang, being a kind and compassionate monk, turned back to Sha Wujing and asked, “Disciple, now that you are accompanying me, I must know your story. What led you to reside in the Flowing-Sand River?”

Sha Wujing bowed deeply and replied, “Master, I was not always a monster. I was once a celestial general in Heaven, serving under the Jade Emperor. My name was Curtain-Raising Marshal, and my duty was to guard the Jade Pool during the Queen Mother’s peach banquets. One day, while I was attending a grand feast, I accidentally broke a crystal goblet belonging to the Queen Mother. The Jade Emperor was furious and banished me to the mortal realm as punishment.

“In my exile, I fell into the Flowing-Sand River, where the currents were fierce, and the waters were cursed. Unable to return to Heaven, I became a monster, feeding on travelers who dared to cross the river. Over time, I repented for my sins, but my nature as a demon barred me from salvation. It was only when the Bodhisattva appeared and told me of the pilgrim’s journey that I saw a chance to atone for my deeds. She instructed me to wait patiently for the arrival of the Master of the Law, and so I did—though my hunger and temper often got the better of me.”

Tang Sanzang sighed and said, “It seems that Heaven’s punishments are harsh, and yet they serve to guide the lost back to the path of righteousness. From now on, you must devote yourself to protecting the scriptures and assisting us on our journey. Do not let your past misdeeds weigh down your heart.”

Sha Wujing knelt and said, “Master, I am deeply grateful for your mercy. I swear to fulfill my duties and follow your teachings.”

Sun Wukong, overhearing all of this, scoffed and said, “Hmph! Another one with a sob story. First the dragon, now this guy. Don’t think for a second that I’ll go easy on you, brother. If you dare slack off or cause trouble, I’ll deal with you myself.”

Sha Wujing, unfazed by Wukong’s brashness, simply bowed and said, “Brother, you are the elder disciple. I will follow your lead and work hard to earn my place among the pilgrims.”

Wukong twirled his staff and muttered, “We’ll see about that.”

With their group now strengthened by the addition of Sha Wujing, the pilgrims pressed onward. The Flowing-Sand River now lay behind them, and the terrain ahead gradually became more mountainous and rugged. The journey was difficult, but with Wukong’s strength, Sha Wujing’s endurance, and the dragon-horse’s speed, they made steady progress.

**The Encounter with the Villagers**

After several days of travel, the pilgrims came across a small village nestled at the foot of a mountain. The houses were simple and weathered, and the villagers looked thin and weary. Seeing the holy monk and his disciples, the villagers rushed out to greet them, bowing deeply.

“Great monk!” the village elder said, his voice trembling with emotion. “You must be a holy man sent by Heaven to save us from our plight! Please, come into our village and hear our troubles.”

Tang Sanzang dismounted from the dragon-horse and said, “Elder, I am but a humble monk on a pilgrimage to the West. If there is any way I can help, I will do my best. What troubles your village?”

The elder led the pilgrims into the village and explained, “Our village lies near a mountain known as Black Wind Mountain. For many years, we lived in peace, but recently, a fearsome demon has taken up residence there. This demon comes to our village every month, demanding offerings of food, livestock, and even young women. Those who refuse are killed without mercy. We are poor and have little left to give, yet the demon’s demands grow greater with each visit. Please, great monk, save us from this monster!”

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang turned to his disciples and said, “Wukong, Wujing, do you hear this? As monks, it is our duty to protect the innocent and help those in need. We cannot ignore the suffering of these people.”

Sun Wukong grinned and said, “Master, you don’t even need to ask. I’ll go up that mountain and take care of this demon right now.”

Sha Wujing stepped forward and said, “Elder Brother, allow me to assist you. Together, we can easily defeat the demon.”

Tang Sanzang nodded and said, “Very well, but be cautious. Demons are cunning and may have traps or allies. Do not underestimate them.”

The villagers provided the pilgrims with food and water, and after a brief rest, Wukong and Sha Wujing set out for Black Wind Mountain. The path up the mountain was steep and overgrown, but the two disciples climbed it with ease.

**The Fight with the Black Wind Demon**

When they reached the summit of Black Wind Mountain, Wukong and Sha Wujing found a dark cave surrounded by bones and debris. A foul stench filled the air, and the howling of the wind seemed to carry an ominous warning.

“This must be the demon’s lair,” Wukong said, gripping his staff. “Let’s go introduce ourselves.”

The two approached the cave and shouted, “Hey, you filthy demon! Come out here and face us! We’re here to put an end to your evil deeds!”

A deep, guttural voice echoed from the cave. “Who dares disturb me? Are you tired of living?”

Moments later, a massive figure emerged from the darkness. The Black Wind Demon was a terrifying sight, with a hulking body covered in black fur, glowing red eyes, and sharp claws. He wielded a giant blade that glinted menacingly in the dim light.

The demon roared, “You dare challenge me? I’ll tear you apart!”

Wukong laughed and said, “Big words for a beast! Let’s see if you can back them up.” He leapt forward, swinging his iron staff, and the battle began.

*The Black Wind Demon swung his blade like a hurricane,  
Wukong’s staff struck like a bolt of lightning.  
Sha Wujing joined the fray, his weapon crushing the ground,  
The mountain trembled under their clash of might.  
Rocks shattered, trees fell,  
The cries of battle echoed through the heavens.*

The demon was strong, but he was no match for the combined strength and skill of Wukong and Sha Wujing. After twenty rounds, the Black Wind Demon began to falter. Wukong saw his chance and struck a powerful blow to the demon’s head, sending him crashing to the ground.

As the demon lay defeated, he cried out, “Spare me! I will leave this mountain and never harm anyone again!”

Wukong raised his staff to finish the demon off, but Sha Wujing said, “Elder Brother, perhaps we should show mercy. The demon has surrendered, and killing him may not be necessary.”

Wukong paused and said, “Fine, but if he causes any more trouble, I won’t be so kind next time.”

The Black Wind Demon swore an oath to leave the mountain and never harm the villagers again. With the demon defeated, Wukong and Sha Wujing returned to the village and informed Tang Sanzang and the villagers of their victory.

The villagers were overjoyed and thanked the pilgrims profusely, offering them food and lodging for the night. The next morning, the pilgrims set out once more, continuing their westward journey.

**Tang Sanzang Falls into Danger Again**

After leaving the villagers behind, the pilgrims resumed their journey westward. Tang Sanzang rode the dragon-horse, with Sha Wujing carrying the luggage on his shoulders and Sun Wukong leading the way. The group traveled through forests, crossed streams, and climbed mountains, encountering no obstacles for several days. Tang Sanzang, feeling the peace of the journey, began to relax.

However, after traveling for a while, the scenery changed. The once-beautiful landscape became barren and ominous. The trees were gnarled and twisted, their branches reaching out like claws. The air grew heavy, and a strange stillness settled over the land.

Tang Sanzang grew uneasy and said, “Wukong, this place feels strange. I fear that danger is near.”

Wukong stopped and sniffed the air. His fiery eyes scanned the surroundings. “Master, there’s definitely something off about this place. I can smell the stench of a demon. Stay alert.”

They continued onward cautiously, but Tang Sanzang was growing tired. Seeing a large tree with thick shade, he said, “Disciple, let us stop here for a moment. I need to rest.”

Wukong frowned and said, “Master, this isn’t a good place to rest. Demons often use places like this to ambush travelers. Let’s keep moving.”

Tang Sanzang, however, insisted. “Disciple, I am weary, and my body cannot endure much more without rest. Let us stop here for just a short while.”

Reluctantly, Wukong agreed. “Fine, but I’ll search the area to make sure it’s safe. Wujing, stay with the master and keep an eye on him.”

Sha Wujing nodded while Wukong leapt into the air and somersaulted away, his staff in hand. He scoured the area, checking for any signs of demons, but found nothing suspicious. Satisfied, he returned to the tree where Tang Sanzang and Sha Wujing were resting.

“Master,” Wukong said, “there don’t seem to be any demons nearby, but we shouldn’t stay here too long.”

Tang Sanzang nodded and began reciting scriptures to calm his heart. The dragon-horse grazed nearby, and Sha Wujing sat silently, his weapon resting by his side. Wukong, however, remained alert, scanning the surroundings for any sign of trouble.

**The White-Bone Demon’s Scheme**

Unbeknownst to the pilgrims, they were being watched. In a nearby cave, a cunning demon known as the White-Bone Demon had caught sight of the holy monk and his disciples. The White-Bone Demon was a shape-shifting spirit who fed on human flesh, and she knew that eating Tang Sanzang’s flesh would grant her immortality.

The demon laughed to herself and said, “That monk is my ticket to eternal life! But his disciples look powerful, especially that monkey with the iron staff. I’ll need to use my wits to get past them.”

The White-Bone Demon transformed herself into the form of a young woman. Dressed in ragged clothes, she looked like a poor village girl, her face pale and her eyes filled with sorrow. She carried a basket of food and approached the pilgrims timidly, her steps hesitant.

When she was close enough, she called out, “Great monk! Please help me! I am just a poor girl, and I bring you some food as an offering.”

Tang Sanzang, hearing her plea, stopped his chanting and looked up. Seeing the frail girl, he said, “Disciple, look at this poor child. She must be suffering. Let us accept her offering and give her some blessings in return.”

Wukong, however, was immediately suspicious. His fiery eyes saw through the girl’s disguise and recognized her true form as a demon. He stepped forward, brandishing his staff, and shouted, “You wicked demon! How dare you try to trick us? Show your true form!”

The White-Bone Demon, startled, quickly stepped back and said in her most pitiful voice, “Great monk, I don’t know what your disciple is talking about. I am just a poor girl trying to offer you some food. Why is he accusing me of being a demon?”

Tang Sanzang frowned and said, “Wukong! This is just a helpless girl. How can you accuse her of being a demon? You must learn to control your temper!”

But Wukong shook his head and said, “Master, you don’t understand. This is no ordinary girl—it’s a demon in disguise. Let me deal with her!”

Without waiting for Tang Sanzang’s permission, Wukong leapt forward and swung his staff at the girl. The White-Bone Demon, seeing that her plan had failed, abandoned her disguise and fled in her true form—a ghastly, skeletal figure with glowing eyes. She disappeared into the forest, leaving behind only a wisp of smoke.

Tang Sanzang, unaware of what had truly happened, was furious. “Wukong!” he shouted. “How could you attack an innocent girl? You have disobeyed my teachings and acted with violence against someone who meant us no harm. If you continue to behave like this, I will not allow you to accompany me any longer!”

Wukong tried to explain, “Master, that wasn’t a girl—it was a demon! I saw through her disguise with my fiery eyes. I was trying to protect you!”

But Tang Sanzang would not listen. “Enough! You have shamed me with your actions. If you cannot control your violent impulses, how can you call yourself a disciple of the Buddha?”

Wukong, frustrated and angry, muttered to himself, “Hmph! Master doesn’t understand. I’m the one keeping him safe from these demons, and yet he scolds me every time.”

**The White-Bone Demon’s Next Attempt**

The White-Bone Demon, though driven away, was not ready to give up. She returned to her cave and devised another plan. This time, she transformed herself into the form of an elderly woman, with gray hair and a cane. She hobbled toward the pilgrims, crying out, “Oh, holy monk! Have you seen my daughter? She went out to gather food and hasn’t returned. Please, can you help me find her?”

Tang Sanzang, hearing her cries, was moved with compassion. “Disciple,” he said to Wukong, “this poor old woman is searching for her daughter. We must help her.”

Wukong, however, immediately recognized the demon’s true form. “Master, it’s her again! This is the same demon as before, just in another disguise. Let me deal with her!”

Tang Sanzang glared at Wukong and said, “Enough of your nonsense! This is an elderly woman in distress. How dare you accuse her of being a demon?”

Wukong, ignoring his master’s anger, stepped forward and swung his staff. The old woman screamed and tried to flee, but Wukong struck her, and her disguise vanished. Once again, the White-Bone Demon revealed her true form and escaped into the forest.

Tang Sanzang was furious. “Wukong, you’ve done it again! You’ve attacked an innocent person for no reason. I cannot tolerate this behavior any longer.”

Wukong tried to protest, but Tang Sanzang refused to listen. “If you continue to act with such violence, I will send you away and complete this journey without you!”

Wukong, feeling unappreciated and misunderstood, clenched his fists and muttered, “Fine! If Master doesn’t trust me, then let him deal with the demons himself.”

**The White-Bone Demon’s Final Attempt**

After her second failure, the White-Bone Demon returned to her cave, seething with anger. "That monkey is too clever," she muttered. "He keeps foiling my plans. But the monk is soft-hearted and naive—if I can turn him completely against the monkey, I’ll have my chance to capture him."

This time, the White-Bone Demon transformed herself into an old man, dressed in tattered clothes, with a bent back and a walking stick. His face was wrinkled, and his eyes were filled with sorrow. Carrying a bundle of straw on his back, the demon hobbled toward the pilgrims.

When the old man was close, he fell to his knees and cried out, “Holy monk, please help me! My daughter and my wife have gone missing. I’ve been searching for them everywhere, but I fear something terrible has happened. Have you seen them?”

Tang Sanzang, hearing the old man’s plea, was deeply moved. “This poor man has lost his family. Disciple, we must help him.”

But Sun Wukong’s fiery eyes saw through the disguise immediately. “Master, don’t be fooled! This is the same demon as before. She’s trying to trick us again.”

Tang Sanzang frowned. “Wukong, you’ve accused both a young girl and an elderly woman of being demons. Now you say this old man is a demon too? How can you be so heartless as to attack innocent people over and over again?”

“Master,” Wukong protested, “I’m telling you the truth! This is no old man—it’s the White-Bone Demon in disguise. Let me deal with her before she causes any harm!”

Tang Sanzang shook his head. “I won’t allow it. You’re blinded by your violent nature. If you harm this man, I will expel you from our journey!”

Wukong was furious, but he said nothing. Instead, he gripped his staff tightly and waited for the demon to make her move.

The White-Bone Demon, seeing her opportunity, cried out in her most pitiful voice, “Great monk, is this how your disciples treat strangers? I only came to ask for help, but now he’s threatening me! If you won’t help me, then I’ll leave.”

As the demon turned to leave, Wukong leapt forward and swung his staff. The blow struck her in the back, and her disguise shattered. The demon’s true form—ghastly and skeletal with glowing eyes—was revealed for a brief moment before she dissolved into smoke and escaped.

Tang Sanzang, who had only seen the old man fall and disappear, was horrified. “Wukong!” he shouted. “You’ve done it again! You’ve attacked an innocent man without reason. I have warned you time and time again, but you refuse to listen. I cannot allow you to continue on this journey with me.”

“Master!” Wukong said, his voice rising in frustration. “That was the White-Bone Demon! She’s been trying to capture you all along. I’ve been protecting you!”

Tang Sanzang shook his head. “I saw no demon, only an old man seeking help. You have betrayed the teachings of the Buddha by acting with violence. I can no longer trust you.”

Despite Sha Wujing’s attempts to mediate, Tang Sanzang refused to calm down. He reached into his robes and took out the golden fillet spell that Guanyin had given him. Holding the prayer beads in his hands, he began chanting the scripture that activated the spell.

The golden fillet around Wukong’s head tightened painfully. Wukong dropped his staff and clutched his head, rolling on the ground in agony. “Master, stop! I’ve done nothing wrong!”

But Tang Sanzang chanted even louder, and the fillet tightened further. Wukong’s cries echoed through the forest, but Tang Sanzang showed no mercy. When he finally stopped, Wukong lay panting on the ground, his face pale and filled with anger and sorrow.

“Master,” Wukong said quietly, “I have endured this journey to protect you, fought countless demons for your safety, and faced death without fear. But today, I see that my loyalty means nothing to you. If you no longer trust me, then I will leave. You can find your way to the West without me.”

Tang Sanzang, still angry, said, “If you cannot follow the teachings of the Buddha and act with compassion, then you are not fit to be my disciple. Go, and do not return.”

Wukong stood up, picked up his staff, and turned away. Without another word, he leapt into the sky and disappeared, leaving Tang Sanzang, Sha Wujing, and the dragon-horse behind.

**Tang Sanzang’s Regret**

After Wukong left, the forest grew eerily quiet. Sha Wujing, carrying the luggage, said gently, “Master, perhaps you were too harsh on Elder Brother. He has always been loyal to you, and his actions may have been justified.”

Tang Sanzang sighed but said nothing. Though his anger had not yet subsided, a part of him felt uneasy at the loss of his most powerful protector. Still, his pride kept him from calling Wukong back.

The group continued on their journey, but without Wukong’s sharp eyes and quick reflexes, Tang Sanzang felt exposed and vulnerable. The road ahead seemed darker, the shadows deeper, and every sound in the forest made him jump.

**The White-Bone Demon Returns**

The White-Bone Demon, though injured, was not defeated. She returned to her cave and nursed her wounds, laughing to herself. “That foolish monk! He’s driven away his greatest defender. Now he’s completely helpless. This time, I’ll capture him for sure.”

The demon transformed herself into a beautiful woman, dressed in fine robes and adorned with jewels. She carried a basket of fresh fruit and walked gracefully along the road, waiting for the pilgrims to approach.

When Tang Sanzang saw the woman, he sighed. “Disciple, I am still troubled by what happened earlier. This woman looks kind and gentle, but I fear Wukong would have accused her of being a demon.”

Sha Wujing said cautiously, “Master, Elder Brother may have had a sharp tongue, but his instincts were rarely wrong. We should be careful.”

Tang Sanzang shook his head. “We cannot judge everyone we meet with suspicion. Let us greet her and see what she wants.”

The woman approached and bowed deeply. “Great monk,” she said, her voice soft and sweet, “I have traveled far to offer you this fruit as a token of respect. Please accept it.”

Tang Sanzang, moved by her kindness, reached out to take the basket. But as soon as he touched it, the woman’s disguise fell away, and the White-Bone Demon revealed her true form. With a cackling laugh, she grabbed Tang Sanzang and hoisted him into the air.

“Foolish monk!” she cried. “Without that monkey to protect you, you’re nothing but prey. Your flesh will grant me immortality!”

Sha Wujing roared in anger and charged at the demon, swinging his weapon. But the White-Bone Demon was prepared. With a wave of her hand, she summoned a gust of wind that knocked Sha Wujing to the ground. The dragon-horse reared up, whinnying in fear.

Tang Sanzang cried out, “Wukong! Save me!” But Wukong was nowhere to be seen.

**Wukong Returns to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit**

After leaving Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong somersaulted through the air, his heart heavy with frustration and grief. "Master doesn’t trust me," he muttered to himself. "I’ve fought countless demons for him, risked my life, and endured the pain of this cursed golden fillet. Yet he refuses to see the truth. If he doesn’t want me, then I’ll go back to where I belong."

With his decision made, Wukong flew back to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, his old home. The mountain was just as he remembered it—lush, vibrant, and full of life. The monkeys who lived there cheered and celebrated when they saw their king return. They surrounded him, offering fruits and flowers, and cried, “Great Sage! You’ve come back to lead us again!”

Wukong forced a smile and said, “Yes, I’m back. There’s no need to worry anymore. Your king will stay here and protect you from now on.”

The monkeys rejoiced, but deep in his heart, Wukong felt restless. Although he was back in the paradise he had created for himself, he couldn’t shake the feeling that he was abandoning his duty. “Master doesn’t need me,” he told himself, “but... without me, how will he survive?”

**Tang Sanzang Falls into the Demon’s Trap**

Meanwhile, Tang Sanzang, Sha Wujing, and the dragon-horse were in grave danger. The White-Bone Demon, having captured Tang Sanzang, carried him to her lair deep within the mountains. Bound with ropes and locked in an iron cage, the holy monk could do nothing but pray for deliverance.

The demon circled the cage, laughing. “You foolish monk,” she taunted. “You drove away your only real protector, and now you’re mine! Once I’ve eaten your flesh, I’ll gain eternal life. No one can save you now.”

Tang Sanzang, terrified but resolute, clasped his hands together and began chanting scriptures. The sound of his prayers filled the cave, and a golden light shone faintly from his body. The White-Bone Demon winced at the light but quickly regained her composure. “Your prayers won’t save you,” she sneered. “I’ll feast on your flesh before the Buddha can come to your aid.”

Outside the cave, Sha Wujing paced back and forth, clutching his weapon. “Master is in danger,” he muttered. “If only Elder Brother were here, we could defeat this demon together. But now it’s just me. What should I do?”

The dragon-horse, sensing the urgency of the situation, neighed and stomped its hooves. Sha Wujing sighed. “I can’t do this alone,” he said. “There’s only one person who can save Master now.”

**Sha Wujing Seeks Wukong’s Help**

With no other options, Sha Wujing decided to find Sun Wukong and beg for his help. He climbed onto the dragon-horse and galloped as fast as he could toward the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. After several days of hard travel, he arrived at the mountain and called out, “Elder Brother! Great Sage! Are you here?”

Wukong, who was resting under a tree, heard Sha Wujing’s voice and frowned. “What does he want?” he muttered. “Didn’t Master say he didn’t need me anymore?”

Still, Wukong couldn’t ignore the call. He stood up, leapt into the air, and landed in front of Sha Wujing. “What are you doing here?” he demanded. “Didn’t Master tell me to leave? Has he finally realized he can’t do without me?”

Sha Wujing bowed deeply and said, “Elder Brother, please don’t be angry. Master is in grave danger. The White-Bone Demon has captured him, and I can’t defeat her alone. Only you have the strength to save him.”

Wukong snorted. “Oh, so now he needs me? After he scolded me and drove me away? Why should I help him?”

“Elder Brother,” Sha Wujing said earnestly, “Master may have been harsh, but he didn’t understand the truth. He’s just a mortal, and his compassion blinds him to the ways of demons. You’ve always been his protector, and without you, he won’t survive. Please, put aside your anger and save him.”

Wukong was silent for a moment, his expression unreadable. Finally, he sighed and said, “Fine. I’ll save him—but not because of him. I’m doing this because it’s the right thing to do. Let’s go.”

**Wukong Confronts the White-Bone Demon**

Wukong and Sha Wujing hurried back to the White-Bone Demon’s lair. When they arrived, they saw Tang Sanzang trapped in the iron cage, his body glowing faintly as he chanted scriptures. The White-Bone Demon was pacing nearby, sharpening her claws and preparing for her feast.

Wukong grinned and said, “That demon sure is bold, thinking she can eat my master. Let’s show her what happens when you mess with the Great Sage Equal to Heaven!”

Without waiting for Sha Wujing, Wukong leapt into the cave, brandishing his iron staff. “Hey, you filthy demon!” he shouted. “Let my master go, or I’ll smash your skull into pieces!”

The White-Bone Demon turned and sneered. “You again? I thought the monk got rid of you. No matter—I’ll kill you first, then feast on him!”

She lunged at Wukong, her claws slashing through the air. But Wukong was too quick. He dodged her attack and struck her with his staff, sending her sprawling across the cave floor. The demon roared in anger and transformed into her true form—a massive skeletal figure covered in black mist, her eyes glowing like embers.

The battle was fierce. The White-Bone Demon summoned gusts of wind and waves of black fire, filling the cave with chaos. But Wukong was undeterred. His staff moved like lightning, striking with precision and power. Sha Wujing joined the fight, using his weapon to block the demon’s attacks and support Wukong.

*The demon howled, her strength like a raging storm,  
Wukong laughed, his strikes as swift as a tempest.  
Sha Wujing held firm, his weapon steady as a mountain,  
The cave shook, rocks crumbled, and darkness gave way to light.*

Finally, Wukong saw an opening. With a mighty leap, he brought his staff down on the demon’s head, shattering her skull. The White-Bone Demon let out a final scream before her body dissolved into smoke and disappeared.

**Tang Sanzang’s Apology**

With the demon defeated, Wukong and Sha Wujing freed Tang Sanzang from the iron cage. The monk, shaken but unharmed, looked at Wukong with tears in his eyes.

“Wukong,” he said, bowing deeply, “I was wrong. I doubted you and accused you unjustly. You saved me once again, even after I drove you away. Please forgive me for my foolishness.”

Wukong scratched his head and said, “Master, I may have a temper, but I’m not one to hold grudges. I’ll always protect you, no matter what. But next time, trust me when I say there’s a demon.”

Tang Sanzang nodded solemnly. “From now on, I will trust your judgment. You’ve proven yourself time and time again.”

The group left the cave together, their bonds stronger than ever. As they continued their journey westward, Tang Sanzang resolved to be more understanding of his disciples, and Wukong vowed to remain vigilant against the dangers that lay ahead.

**Chapter 27: The White Bone Demon Tricks Tang Sanzang Three Times, The Sage Monk Drives Away the Monkey King**

The next morning, Tang Sanzang and his disciples prepared to set off. Zhenyuan Daxian, who had become sworn brothers with Sun Wukong, was reluctant to let them leave and hosted them for several more days. Tang Sanzang, having recovered his health from taking the Great Rejuvenation Pill, felt rejuvenated, as if reborn. However, his determination to seek the scriptures was unwavering, so they had to bid farewell and continue their journey.

As they departed, they soon came upon a towering mountain. Tang Sanzang cautioned his disciples, "Disciples, the road ahead is steep and treacherous. I fear the horse may not proceed easily. We must be extremely cautious."

Sun Wukong reassured him, "Master, don’t worry. We’ll manage it." The Monkey King took the lead, iron staff in hand, clearing the path. The mountain was a spectacle of nature’s grandeur: jagged peaks stacked upon one another, twisting ravines winding through the terrain. Wolves and tigers roamed in groups, while deer and antelope wandered in herds. Wild boars darted in thickets, and foxes and rabbits huddled in clusters. Enormous pythons spouted mist, and serpents exhaled eerie winds. The mountain path was overgrown with brambles, yet the ridges were adorned with majestic pine and cedar trees. Everywhere, vines hung in profusion, and fragrant grass stretched endlessly.

The sheer scale of the mountain was awe-inspiring. Tang Sanzang, sitting on his horse, felt a chill in his heart. But Sun Wukong swung his iron staff, let out a deafening roar, and frightened the wolves and insects into fleeing, while tigers and leopards scattered in terror. The group pressed on, navigating through the rocky terrain.

Around midday, Tang Sanzang said, "Wukong, I’ve grown hungry. Can you find some food for us?"

Sun Wukong laughed and said, "Master, you’re truly asking a lot of us. Here we are, in the middle of the mountain wilderness, with no villages ahead and no inns behind. Even if we had money, there’s nowhere to buy food. Where am I supposed to find a meal?"

Tang Sanzang, displeased, scolded him, "You lazy monkey! Do you think I saved you from being trapped under the mountain for nothing? I gave you your freedom, shaved your head, and made you my disciple. How can you be so unwilling to put in effort? You’re always full of excuses!"

Sun Wukong protested, "Master, I’ve been nothing but diligent. How can you accuse me of laziness?"

Tang Sanzang retorted, "If you’re truly diligent, then why haven’t you gone to find food for me? I’m hungry—how can I keep going? Besides, this place is full of poisonous mists. How will we ever reach Thunderclap Monastery if we don’t press on?"

Sun Wukong sighed, "Master, don’t be angry. I’ll find food for you. You stay here and rest. I’ll search for a nearby village or some edibles."

With that, Sun Wukong leapt into the clouds, shielding his eyes as he surveyed the surroundings. The western path was desolate, with no signs of human habitation, only trees and wilderness. After some time, he spotted a patch of red on the southern slope of a mountain. He descended and reported back, "Master, I’ve found something to eat."

Tang Sanzang asked, "What is it?"

Sun Wukong replied, "There are no villages nearby, but on the southern mountain, I saw some ripe peaches. They’ll make for a decent snack."

Tang Sanzang, delighted, said, "As monks, if we can have peaches, that’s more than enough. Go quickly!"

Sun Wukong grabbed the begging bowl and soared off toward the southern mountain.

Meanwhile, as the saying goes: "Where there are high mountains, there are bound to be spirits; where there are steep ridges, demons dwell." Indeed, a demon resided on this very mountain. Sun Wukong’s presence startled this monster, who ascended into the clouds and, spotting Tang Sanzang resting below, was overjoyed. "What great fortune!" the demon thought. "For years, I’ve heard talk of the Tang Monk from the East, the reincarnation of the Golden Cicada, whose flesh grants immortality. And now, here he is!"

The demon prepared to seize Tang Sanzang. However, seeing that he was guarded by two disciples—Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing—the demon hesitated. Though these two lacked great skills, Zhu Bajie had once been the Marshal Tianpeng, and Sha Wujing had been the Curtain-Lifting General. Their latent power was enough to intimidate the demon for now.

"Let me test them first," the demon thought.

This cunning creature descended into a valley and transformed into a young woman of extraordinary beauty. Her features were exquisite: delicate brows, bright eyes, white teeth, and ruby lips. She carried a green clay jar in one hand and a blue porcelain bottle in the other. Dressed in fine clothes, she walked gracefully toward Tang Sanzang. Seeing her approach, Tang Sanzang exclaimed, "Bajie, Wujing, look! Wukong said this place was deserted, yet here comes someone."

Zhu Bajie volunteered, "Master, you and Sha Wujing stay here. Let me go and see who it is."

He set down his rake, adjusted his robe, and swaggered over to meet her, putting on an air of refinement. As he drew closer, he got a good look at her: her skin was as smooth as jade, and her chest was faintly visible through her blouse. Her delicate eyebrows were painted with green, her almond-shaped eyes gleamed like stars, and her natural charm radiated purity. Zhu Bajie couldn’t help himself and blurted out, "Fair lady, where are you headed? And what are you carrying?"

The young woman, who was none other than the demon in disguise, replied with a sweet voice, "Holy monk, I have rice in this green jar and fried gluten in this blue bottle. I’ve come to offer a meal to wandering monks as a fulfillment of my vow."

Zhu Bajie was overjoyed and rushed back to report, "Master! Heaven has sent us a blessing. You were hungry, and now a kind soul has come to offer food."

Tang Sanzang was skeptical. "Bajie, don’t make up nonsense. We’ve been traveling for so long without meeting anyone decent. How could someone suddenly show up with offerings?"

"Master, she’s right here," Zhu Bajie insisted.

When Tang Sanzang saw the woman, he clasped his hands and greeted her, "Blessed lady, where are you from? What vow brings you to feed wandering monks?"

The demon, feigning sincerity, replied, "This mountain is called White Tiger Ridge. My family lives just west of here. My parents are devout and charitable, often hosting monks. They had no children for many years, and after much prayer, I was born. They’ve arranged a marriage for me, but my parents are old and rely on me to care for them. Today, I was bringing lunch to my husband and his workers, but I encountered you along the way. I thought it would be virtuous to offer you this meal instead."

Tang Sanzang, hearing this, hesitated, saying, "It wouldn’t be proper for me to accept your kind offering. What if your husband finds out and becomes angry?"

The demon reassured him, "My husband is also a devout man. If he hears that I shared our food with a holy monk, he will only commend me."

Tang Sanzang was about to relent, but Sun Wukong suddenly returned, carrying peaches. Using his fiery eyes, he instantly recognized the woman as a demon. Without hesitation, he drew his staff and struck at her. Tang Sanzang, alarmed, shouted, "Wukong! Why are you attacking an innocent person?"

"Master, she’s no mere woman. She’s a demon trying to deceive you!" Sun Wukong explained.

Tang Sanzang, however, refused to believe him. "Wukong, you’re being reckless! This kind woman offered us food out of the goodness of her heart. How can you call her a demon?"

Sun Wukong laughed bitterly. "Master, you don’t understand. Back when I lived in the Water Curtain Cave, I used to lure humans the same way—sometimes with gold, sometimes with illusions, sometimes with beauty. Once caught, I’d cook them however I pleased. Master, if I hadn’t come back in time, you’d have fallen into her trap!"

Tang Sanzang dismissed his warnings, convinced the woman was genuine. Sun Wukong, exasperated, struck the demon with his staff. The demon used a magic trick to shed her false body, leaving behind a lifeless corpse. Tang Sanzang, horrified, scolded Wukong for his violence.

**The White Bone Demon’s Second Deception**

After Sun Wukong struck down the young woman and revealed her demonic form, the White Bone Demon escaped by shedding her false body, leaving behind a lifeless corpse. Tang Sanzang, unaware of the demon’s tricks, became furious with Sun Wukong.

Sanzang scolded him harshly, saying, "Wukong, you’ve cultivated no compassion at all! This was a living person, yet you struck her down so ruthlessly. How can you call yourself a monk? I recited the spell earlier to discipline you, yet you’ve learned nothing. You are wild and uncontrollable!"

Sun Wukong tried to explain, "Master, you’ve been deceived. That was no ordinary woman—it was a demon in disguise. She came to harm you, and I acted to protect you. If I hadn’t dealt with her, you would have been in grave danger!"

But Tang Sanzang refused to listen, angrily saying, "You always claim to see demons everywhere. How can I trust that this wasn’t an innocent woman? You’ve killed needlessly, bringing sin to our journey."

Zhu Bajie, always eager to stir up trouble, chimed in, "Master, I’ve told you this monkey is trouble. He’s violent by nature and has no sense of restraint. We should never have trusted him."

Sun Wukong, growing frustrated, said, "Bajie, you’re just a lazy glutton who knows nothing of demons or danger. You’re slandering me without cause. If you don’t want to protect Master, then stay out of the way!"

Tang Sanzang, angered further by the quarrel, recited the **Tightening Spell**. The golden band on Sun Wukong’s head tightened, causing him unbearable pain. The Monkey King fell to the ground, clutching his head and writhing in agony. He pleaded, "Master, please stop! I’ve done nothing wrong. Why punish me for saving your life?"

Tang Sanzang ignored his pleas and continued reciting the spell until Sun Wukong promised to remain silent. Feeling humiliated, the Monkey King said no more and followed the group in silence as they continued their journey.

The White Bone Demon, furious that her plan had failed, retreated to a secluded cave to devise a new scheme. "That monkey truly has sharp eyes," she thought. "But the monk and his other disciples are foolish and easy to deceive. I’ll try again."

This time, the demon transformed into an elderly woman, her hair silver-white and her face lined with wrinkles. She carried a walking stick and hobbled toward the travelers, pretending to be searching for her daughter. She cried out, "Oh, kind monks, have you seen my daughter? She left this morning to bring food to her husband and hasn’t returned. I fear something terrible has happened!"

Tang Sanzang, hearing her cries, was moved with compassion. "Old mother, do not worry," he said. "We did see a young woman earlier who came to offer us food. Perhaps she’s nearby."

The demon, pretending to be grief-stricken, wailed, "Oh, my poor child! If she met with trouble, I don’t know how I’ll go on. Please, holy monks, help me find her!"

Zhu Bajie, always eager to impress, said, "Don’t worry, old mother. Leave it to me! I’ll help you find your daughter." He turned to Tang Sanzang and added, "Master, this poor woman needs our help. We can’t refuse her request."

Sun Wukong, however, saw through the disguise immediately. His fiery eyes discerned the demon’s true form, and he shouted, "Master, don’t be fooled! This so-called old woman is the same demon who deceived us earlier!"

Tang Sanzang, unwilling to believe him, scolded, "Wukong, you’ve gone mad! How could an old woman be a demon? Your suspicion knows no bounds. If you dare harm her, I’ll have no choice but to discipline you again."

Sun Wukong, frustrated but determined to protect his master, leapt forward and swung his iron staff at the old woman. The demon, seeing that her disguise had been discovered, quickly shed her false body again and fled into the sky. This left behind another lifeless corpse, this time appearing as an elderly woman.

Tang Sanzang, seeing the scene, grew even angrier. "Wukong!" he shouted. "This is the second time you’ve killed someone without cause. How can I tolerate such violence? You’ve brought great sin upon us!"

Sun Wukong protested, "Master, I’ve told you repeatedly—this is a demon! She means to harm you, and I’ve done nothing but protect you. Why won’t you trust me?"

But Tang Sanzang, his heart hardened by Zhu Bajie’s whispered complaints, refused to listen. Once again, he recited the Tightening Spell, causing Sun Wukong unbearable pain. The Monkey King fell to his knees, clutching his head. Despite his agony, he did not fight back, but his resentment grew deeper.

The White Bone Demon, now enraged and humiliated, returned to her cave. She vowed, "I’ll try one last time. If I don’t succeed, I’ll have to retreat for now. That monk is foolish, but the monkey is a nuisance."

This time, she transformed into an elderly man, dressed in tattered robes and carrying a basket of offerings. She approached the travelers, pretending to be the father of the young woman and husband of the elderly woman. "Merciful monks," she said, "my wife and daughter went out this morning to bring food to travelers, but neither has returned. I fear something terrible may have happened to them. Have you seen them?"

Tang Sanzang, moved by the old man’s sorrow, said, "Elder, we did meet two women earlier who came to offer us food. But..." He hesitated, unsure how to explain the events.

Zhu Bajie, eager to place the blame on Sun Wukong, said, "It’s all the monkey’s fault! He killed them both, claiming they were demons. We begged him to stop, but he wouldn’t listen. Now your family is gone!"

The old man (the demon in disguise) pretended to be overcome with grief, crying, "Oh, what a tragedy! My wife and daughter were kind souls who only wanted to help others. And now they’ve been murdered by this violent beast!"

Tang Sanzang, hearing this, became even more furious with Sun Wukong. "Wukong, do you hear this? Your reckless actions have caused irreparable harm. How can I keep you as my disciple when you bring such evil upon us?"

Sun Wukong, his patience finally at its limit, said, "Master, if you truly believe I’m in the wrong, then I have nothing more to say. But mark my words—if you send me away, you’ll regret it when this demon finally reveals her true form."

Tang Sanzang, convinced by Zhu Bajie and the demon’s disguise, recited the Tightening Spell once more, forcing Sun Wukong to the ground. The Monkey King, humiliated and angry, finally rose and said, "Very well, Master. If you no longer trust me, I’ll leave. But when danger comes, don’t say I didn’t warn you."

With that, Sun Wukong leapt into the sky and disappeared, returning to his home on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit.

**Tang Sanzang’s Peril**

With Sun Wukong gone, the White Bone Demon saw her chance. She abandoned her disguise as the old man and revealed her true form—a terrifying spirit with a ghastly white face and a body like dry bones. She captured Tang Sanzang and carried him away to her cave, laughing, "Now nothing can stop me from devouring the flesh of the holy monk!"

Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing, realizing too late that Sun Wukong had been right all along, were powerless to stop her.

**The White Bone Demon Captures Tang Sanzang**

After Sun Wukong left, the White Bone Demon, confident that her greatest obstacle was gone, revealed her true form. She transformed back into her ghastly demonic state. Her face was pale as death, her body thin and bony, and her eyes glowed with a sinister light. Laughing wickedly, she said, "The meddlesome monkey is gone—now no one can stop me from feasting on the flesh of the Tang Monk and achieving immortality!"

She descended from the mountain and appeared right in front of Tang Sanzang, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing. Without disguising herself this time, she lunged at Tang Sanzang, her claws aimed directly at him.

Zhu Bajie, seeing the demon’s terrifying appearance, dropped his rake in fear and scrambled backward, shouting, "Master! It’s a demon! Save yourself!" Sha Wujing, though braver, was no match for the White Bone Demon’s speed and power. Before either of them could act, the demon captured Tang Sanzang and carried him off into the sky.

The demon laughed as she flew off toward her lair. Tang Sanzang, helpless in her grasp, could only cry out, "Disciples! Save me! Wukong! Where are you?"

**Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing’s Argument**

Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing stood frozen with fear, watching the demon disappear into the distance with their master. Zhu Bajie, shaking with panic, said, "Wujing, what do we do now? The demon’s taken Master, and we’re no match for her!"

Sha Wujing scolded him, "It’s your fault! You were the one who kept badmouthing Brother Monkey to Master, and now he’s gone. If Wukong were here, this demon wouldn’t have stood a chance!"

Zhu Bajie retorted, "How is this my fault? The monkey’s temper is unbearable, and Master was right to send him away! Besides, if he’s as powerful as you say, why didn’t he stay to protect Master in the first place?"

Sha Wujing sighed. "Enough arguing. What’s done is done. We need to find a way to rescue Master before it’s too late. But how can we fight that demon on our own?"

Zhu Bajie scratched his head and said, "The only thing we can do is go find Brother Monkey and beg him to come back. He’s the only one who can defeat that demon."

Reluctantly, the two disciples decided to seek out Sun Wukong.

**Sun Wukong’s Return to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit**

After leaving his master, Sun Wukong flew back to his old home, the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. When he arrived, the little monkeys who served him as their king came running out to greet him.

"Great Sage! Great Sage!" they cried. "You’ve returned! We’ve missed you so much!"

Sun Wukong, however, was not in a celebratory mood. He sat on his stone throne, his face dark with anger and sadness. "I left to follow the Tang Monk and help him obtain the scriptures, but he no longer trusts me. He recited the Tightening Spell and drove me away. I don’t know why I ever agreed to be his disciple in the first place."

The little monkeys tried to cheer him up, saying, "Great Sage, you’re the most powerful being under Heaven. Why should you care what the Tang Monk thinks? Stay here with us, and we’ll live happily like we used to!"

Sun Wukong sighed. "You don’t understand. I may not care about the monk’s opinions, but I swore an oath to protect him on his journey. If I abandon him now, I’ll lose my honor."

Even as he spoke, Sun Wukong remained conflicted. Part of him wanted to return to protect his master, but another part felt bitter about the way he had been treated.

**Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing Seek Sun Wukong**

Meanwhile, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing made their way to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. When they arrived, they were immediately surrounded by the little monkeys, who shouted, "Who are you? What business do you have here?"

Zhu Bajie waved his hands and said, "Hey, hey, don’t get so excited! We’re friends of your Great Sage. We’ve come to see him."

The little monkeys led them to Sun Wukong, who was still sitting on his throne. When he saw them, Wukong frowned and said, "What are you two doing here? Don’t tell me the monk has sent you to bring me back. I have no intention of returning."

Zhu Bajie knelt before him, putting on a pitiful expression. "Brother Monkey, please don’t hold a grudge. Master was wrong to mistrust you, but he’s in danger now! The demon has captured him and plans to eat him. Without your help, we’ll never be able to save him."

Sun Wukong snorted. "Oh? So now you want my help? Where was this respect when you were slandering me to Master? You and that monk treated me like a criminal. Why should I care what happens to him now?"

Sha Wujing stepped forward and said earnestly, "Brother, I understand your anger, but Master is in grave danger. You know better than anyone that he’s kind-hearted but naive. He doesn’t understand the ways of demons like you do. If you don’t help him, he’ll surely die."

Sun Wukong’s heart softened a little at Sha Wujing’s words, but he wasn’t ready to forgive Zhu Bajie. "Wujing, I’ll consider helping Master, but only because of you. As for this pig," he said, pointing to Zhu Bajie, "he’d better stay out of my way if he knows what’s good for him."

Zhu Bajie, eager to avoid conflict, quickly agreed. "Of course, of course! Brother Monkey, we’ll follow your lead. Just save Master, and I’ll do whatever you say!"

Sun Wukong stood up and grabbed his iron staff. "Very well. Let’s go save the monk. But don’t think this means I’ve forgiven any of you."

**Sun Wukong Confronts the White Bone Demon**

Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing flew back to the mountain where the White Bone Demon’s lair was hidden. Using his sharp eyes, Wukong quickly located the cave where the demon was holding Tang Sanzang captive. Without hesitation, he stormed into the cave, swinging his iron staff and shouting, "Demon! Come out and face me!"

The White Bone Demon, startled by his sudden return, snarled, "You again! I thought I got rid of you!"

She transformed into her true form, a hideous skeleton with sharp claws and glowing eyes. "You may have ruined my plans before," she said, "but this time, you won’t escape alive!"

The battle between Sun Wukong and the White Bone Demon was fierce. She summoned dark winds and threw boulders, but Wukong dodged them all with ease. He struck at her with his iron staff, shattering her magical defenses. No matter what tricks she used, Wukong was too quick and too powerful for her.

Finally, with a mighty swing, Sun Wukong struck the demon directly on the head, shattering her skull. Her body crumbled into a pile of bones, and her spirit was destroyed.

**Tang Sanzang’s Regret**

After defeating the demon, Sun Wukong freed Tang Sanzang and brought him out of the cave. Tang Sanzang, realizing how close he had come to death, knelt before Wukong and said, "Wukong, I was wrong to mistrust you. I now see that you were only trying to protect me. Please forgive me and return to the journey."

Sun Wukong, though still hurt by the earlier betrayal, said, "Master, I swore to protect you, and I will keep my word. But from now on, you must trust me when I say there is danger. Otherwise, I won’t stay by your side."

Tang Sanzang promised to trust him in the future, and the group resumed their journey westward.

**Chapter 47: The Holy Monk is Blocked by the Tongtian River at Night, Gold and Wood Save the Children with Compassion**

The story continues with the king leaning on his dragon throne, tears streaming down his face, crying incessantly until nightfall. Sun Wukong stepped forward, shouting:

"Why are you so confused? Look at the corpses of those Taoists—they are a tiger, a deer, and that so-called 'Goat Strength' is just an antelope! If you don't believe me, dig up their bones and see for yourself. What human has such a skeleton? They were mountain beasts that had cultivated into spirits, conspiring to harm you. They didn’t dare act yet because your destiny was still strong. But in two years, when your fortune wanes, they would have taken your life and your kingdom! Luckily, we came early, eliminated these monsters, and saved your life. Why are you still crying? Quickly prepare official documentation to send us on our way!"

The king, upon hearing this, finally understood. The civil and military officials all confirmed:

"The deceased were indeed a white deer, a yellow tiger, and goat bones were found in the oil cauldron. The words of the holy monk must not be ignored."

The king, realizing the truth, expressed his gratitude:

"Thank you, holy monk. It is already late today. Let the Grand Preceptor escort the holy monk to Zhiyuan Monastery for rest. Tomorrow, at morning court, I will hold a grand banquet in the eastern pavilion to express my thanks."

Thus, the Tang Monk and his disciples were sent to the monastery for the night. Early the next morning, the king convened his court, issuing an edict to post notices inviting monks to the city. Meanwhile, preparations for the banquet were made. After court, the king personally went to Zhiyuan Monastery to invite the Tang Monk and his disciples to the feast.

During the banquet, the monks who had escaped death on the riverbank heard about the notices. They eagerly entered the city, seeking Sun Wukong to offer their thanks. At the end of the banquet, the king handed over the official documents, and along with the queen, concubines, and ministers, escorted the Tang Monk out of the city gates. Along the roadside, the rescued monks knelt, chanting:

"Great Sage Equal to Heaven! We are the monks who escaped death on the riverbank. We heard you eliminated the monsters, saved us, and even persuaded the king to post notices inviting monks back. We have come to offer our gratitude."

Wukong laughed:

"How many of you are there?"

"Five hundred, not one less," they replied.

Wukong shook his body, collecting the hairs he had used to create the clones of the monks. Then he addressed everyone:

"These monks were indeed my doing. The cartloads of monks I saved, the monsters I killed—everything was done by me. Now that the monsters are gone, let me tell you: in the future, do not blindly believe in superstition. Unite the three teachings—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—respect all faiths, and nurture talent. Only then will your kingdom endure."

The king expressed endless gratitude and sent the Tang Monk and his disciples on their way.

The Tang Monk and his disciples resumed their journey, diligently pursuing the scriptures. They traveled by day, rested by night, endured hunger and thirst, and before they knew it, spring passed, summer waned, and autumn arrived. One evening, as the sky darkened, the Tang Monk reined in his horse and asked:

"Disciples, where shall we rest tonight?"

Sun Wukong replied:

"Master, monks should not speak like laypeople."

The Tang Monk asked:

"What’s the difference between laypeople and monks?"

Wukong explained:

"Laypeople, at this hour, enjoy warm beds, embrace their children, and sleep beside their spouses. But we monks must travel under the moon and stars, endure the wind and water, and move forward if there’s a road, stopping only if there isn’t."

Zhu Bajie complained:

"Brother, you only see one side of things. The roads are treacherous, and I’m carrying a heavy load. We need to find a place to rest, restore our energy, and continue tomorrow. Otherwise, I’ll collapse from exhaustion!"

Wukong suggested:

"Let’s walk a bit further by moonlight. If we find a house, we can rest there."

With no better option, the group followed Wukong. After walking for some time, they heard the sound of rushing water. Bajie exclaimed:

"We’re doomed! We’ve reached the end of the road!"

Sha Wujing added:

"It’s a river blocking our way."

The Tang Monk asked:

"How will we cross it?"

Bajie suggested:

"Let me test its depth."

The Tang Monk admonished:

"Wuneng, don’t be reckless. How can you test the depth of a river?"

Bajie replied:

"I’ll find a pebble, throw it in, and see. If it splashes, it’s shallow; if it sinks with a thud, it’s deep."

Wukong laughed:

"Go ahead and try."

Bajie picked up a stone and threw it into the river. It sank immediately with a deep sound.

"Deep, deep, deep! We can’t cross!" he declared.

The Tang Monk sighed:

"You’ve tested the depth, but how wide is it?"

"That, I don’t know," Bajie admitted.

Sun Wukong said:

"Let me check."

The Great Sage leaped onto his somersault cloud and soared into the sky. Looking down, he saw a vast expanse of water under the moonlight. The river stretched endlessly, reflecting the heavens:

*The moon’s glow shimmered on the waves,  
The heavens mirrored in the river’s expanse.  
A divine stream swallowed Mount Hua's splendor,  
Its mighty current coursing through countless rivers.  
Thousand-layered waves rolled,  
Ten-thousand towering peaks surged.  
No fishing fires lit the banks,  
Only herons slept on the sands.  
The scene resembled the sea,  
Boundless and without end.*

Wukong descended and reported:

"Master, the river is vast—so wide that I can’t see the other side, even with my fiery eyes. There’s no way to measure its breadth."

The Tang Monk was horrified, his voice trembling:

"What shall we do?"

Sha Wujing noticed something by the water’s edge and said:

"Master, look! Isn’t that a person standing there?"

Wukong speculated:

"Perhaps it’s a fisherman. Let me ask."

He approached, staff in hand, but upon closer inspection, it wasn’t a person—it was a stone tablet. Carved on it were the words “Tongtian River” in large seal script, followed by the inscription:

*"Eight hundred li across, rarely traversed since ancient times."*

Wukong called out:

"Master, come and see!"

The Tang Monk read the inscription and wept:

"Oh, disciples! When I left Chang’an, I thought the journey to the West would be easy. Who knew it would be so fraught with monsters, mountains, and rivers?"

Bajie interrupted:

"Master, listen! Isn’t that the sound of cymbals and drums? It must be a household conducting a ritual. Let’s go ask for shelter, eat a vegetarian meal, and inquire about a ferry."

Hearing the sounds of ritual music, the Tang Monk agreed. Wukong led the way, following the sound. They walked across uneven sandbanks until they reached a village of about four or five hundred households. The homes were well-built, nestled against the mountains and bordering a stream.

*Wooden gates closed against the night,  
Bamboo courtyards silent under the stars.  
Herons dreamed on the sandbanks,  
Cuckoos whispered beyond the willows.  
Scattered lights flickered faintly,  
Half the sky illuminated by a hanging moon.  
The fragrance of white water-lilies wafted,  
Carried by the autumn wind across the river.*

The Tang Monk dismounted and approached a house adorned with banners and lit with lanterns. A fragrant aroma of incense filled the air.

"Disciples, this place is far better than the wilderness. Let me go alone to request shelter. If they agree, I’ll call for you. If not, stay here and don’t cause trouble. Your appearances might scare people and create problems," he instructed.

Wukong agreed, and the Tang Monk approached the house.

The Tang Monk approached the gate and saw a plaque hanging above the doorway, which read **"House of the Chen Family."** He knocked on the gate and softly called out:

"May I trouble the host of the house to open the door? This poor monk, traveling west to fetch the scriptures, has come to beg for shelter for the night."

After a moment, someone inside responded:

"Who’s knocking at this late hour?"

The Tang Monk replied:

"This poor monk is traveling to the West. Night has fallen, and I find myself stranded at this riverbank. I humbly request a place to rest for the night."

Hearing this, the person inside opened the gate. A middle-aged man, dressed in plain clothes and carrying a lantern, came out. He looked at the monk and said:

"Master, where are you from, and how did you end up here?"

The Tang Monk explained:

"I am a monk from the Great Tang Dynasty, appointed by the Emperor to journey west and retrieve the true scriptures. As we traveled today, night fell, and we came to this Tongtian River but could not find a way to cross. Seeing the lights of your home, I have come to beg for shelter for the night."

The man sighed and said:

"Master, you are welcome to stay, but you’ve come at a very inopportune time. Our family is currently consumed with grief and sorrow."

The Tang Monk asked:

"What grief troubles you?"

The man replied:

"Please come inside, and I will tell you."

The Tang Monk entered the courtyard, and the man led him to the main hall. Inside, the altar was adorned with burning incense and candles. A woman, along with two teenage boys and a young girl, was kneeling in front of the altar, weeping bitterly. The Tang Monk asked:

"Why is your family mourning?"

The man sighed deeply and said:

"Master, you wouldn’t know this, but this Tongtian River is over eight hundred li wide, and its waters are treacherous—filled with disasters and demons. No ferryman dares to cross it. In this village, we have a custom: every year, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, the river god demands the sacrifice of a pair of children—a boy and a girl. If we fail to send the sacrifice, the river god unleashes floods that drown our fields and destroy our homes. It has been this way for generations. My family was unlucky this year; the lot fell upon my two children. Tonight is the night of the sacrifice, and I am powerless to save them. How can I not grieve?"

The Tang Monk was shocked and said:

"How can such a barbaric custom exist? Sacrificing innocent children to appease a river god—is this not murder? Surely there must be another way!"

The man replied:

"Master, I agree with you. But this is the way it has always been. If we do not offer the children, the entire village will suffer. I would rather sacrifice my own children than bring calamity upon my neighbors."

Hearing this, the Tang Monk’s heart was filled with sorrow, and he said:

"Kind host, I have three disciples who are skilled in dealing with demons. Perhaps they can help you solve this matter and save your children."

The man was astonished and asked:

"Master, is this true? If your disciples can save my children, our family will be forever indebted to you!"

The Tang Monk replied:

"Let me call them inside so you may meet them."

He stepped outside and called for his disciples. Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing entered the courtyard. When the man saw Sun Wukong’s fiery eyes and golden staff, Zhu Bajie’s pig-like face, and Sha Wujing’s menacing appearance, he was startled and fell to his knees, exclaiming:

"Are these immortals who have descended to save us?"

Sun Wukong laughed and said:

"We aren’t immortals; we’re just disciples of this monk. Tell us what’s going on, and we’ll see if we can help."

The Tang Monk explained the situation to his disciples. Sun Wukong grinned and said:

"Master, don’t worry. This so-called river god is probably just a demon. Let me handle it. I’ll go to the river, see what kind of monster it is, and teach it a lesson!"

The man, hearing this, was overjoyed and said:

"If you can defeat the river god and save my children, you will be the saviors of our entire village!"

The Chen family prepared a simple meal for the travelers, and after eating, Sun Wukong said:

"Host, where are the children who are to be sacrificed? Bring them here."

The man brought out his son and daughter, both dressed in ceremonial robes, with tears streaming down their faces. The little boy, trembling, said:

"Father, must we really go to the river god? I don’t want to die!"

The father, choking back tears, said:

"My children, if there were any other way, I would never let you go. But tonight, we may have hope. These great monks have come to save you."

Sun Wukong stepped forward and said:

"Don’t cry, children. I’ll go in your place. Let me disguise myself as the boy, and my brother Bajie can transform into the girl. We’ll fool the river god and see what kind of monster it is."

Zhu Bajie protested:

"Why do I have to be the girl? Can’t Sha Wujing do it?"

Sun Wukong laughed:

"Because you’re fat and soft—perfect for the role! Besides, you’re used to playing tricks on people. Now stop complaining and get ready!"

With that, Sun Wukong plucked two hairs from his head and transformed them into exact replicas of the Chen family’s children. The real children were hidden safely inside the house. Sun Wukong and Zhu Bajie then used their transformation skills to take the forms of the boy and girl. The Chen family prepared the sacrificial boat, and the two "children" were placed inside. The boat was pushed into the river and began to drift toward the middle of the water.

As the boat floated on the dark, moonlit river, Sun Wukong whispered to Zhu Bajie:

"Stay alert. The monster will appear soon. When it does, don’t panic. I’ll handle it."

Suddenly, the water began to churn, and a great wave rose up. Out of the depths emerged a terrifying creature with the body of a dragon and the head of a fish. Its eyes glowed like lanterns, and its voice boomed like thunder:

"Who dares disturb my offering?"

The creature lunged toward the boat, but Sun Wukong leaped into the air, shouting:

"Your offering? Nonsense! Take this!"

He swung his golden staff, striking the creature’s head. The monster roared in pain and dove back into the water. Zhu Bajie, still trembling, muttered:

"Brother, don’t scare it off! We need to catch it!"

Sun Wukong replied:

"Relax! It won’t escape. I’ll chase it to its lair and finish it off!"

With that, Sun Wukong dove into the river, pursuing the monster into the depths.

Sun Wukong dove into the river, chasing the monster into the depths. The water churned as he swam, his golden staff ready for battle. The river demon, seeing Wukong pursue him, growled:

"Who are you to meddle in my affairs? Do you not fear for your life?"

Wukong laughed and replied:

"You ignorant beast! I am the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, here to punish you for harming innocent lives. Prepare yourself!"

The river demon, enraged, swung his massive claws at Wukong. But Wukong was quick; he dodged the attack with ease and retaliated, striking the demon squarely on the head with his staff. The demon howled in pain and fled deeper into the river.

Sun Wukong shouted:

"You can run, but you can’t hide! I’ll follow you to the ends of the water!"

The demon swam to his underwater lair, a vast, gloomy palace adorned with coral and pearls. Inside, dozens of river spirits and water demons awaited their master. The river demon shouted to his minions:

"Quick! Help me fend off this intruder!"

The water demons charged at Wukong, wielding tridents and spears. Wukong, undaunted, spun his golden staff, creating a whirlwind that sent many of them flying. He fought valiantly, defeating the demon’s minions one by one.

The river demon, realizing he was no match for Wukong, transformed into a giant fish and attempted to escape. Wukong saw through the disguise and shouted:

"Trying to flee? Not so fast!"

With a swift leap, Wukong struck the fish with his staff, forcing the demon to revert to his original form. The demon begged for mercy, crying:

"Great Sage, spare my life! I was only following the orders of the Dragon King of the Western Ocean. He commanded me to demand sacrifices from the villagers!"

Wukong sneered and said:

"Following orders? That’s no excuse for your evil deeds! I’ll take you to my master, and he’ll decide your fate."

Wukong tied up the river demon with magic ropes and carried him out of the water.

Meanwhile, on the riverbank, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing were waiting anxiously. Bajie muttered:

"That monkey’s been gone a long time. Do you think he’s in trouble?"

Sha Wujing replied:

"Don’t underestimate Brother Wukong. He’s more than capable of handling a little river demon."

Just then, the river began to bubble and churn. Moments later, Wukong emerged, dragging the bound demon with him. He grinned and shouted:

"Master, I’ve caught the beast!"

The Tang Monk, relieved, stepped forward and said:

"Wukong, is this the river god who has been terrorizing the villagers?"

Wukong replied:

"Yes, Master. This is the monster responsible for the sacrifices. He claims he was acting under the orders of the Dragon King of the Western Ocean, but that’s no excuse for his crimes."

The Tang Monk turned to the river demon and said:

"You have caused immense suffering by demanding the lives of innocent children. Do you feel no remorse for your actions?"

The river demon bowed his head and said:

"Great monk, I was wrong. Please forgive me. I swear to abandon my evil ways and never harm the villagers again."

The Tang Monk, moved by the demon’s repentance, said:

"Wukong, release him. Let us give him a chance to reform."

Wukong protested:

"Master, you’re too soft-hearted! This beast deserves to be punished, not forgiven."

The Tang Monk replied:

"Wukong, even demons can repent and change their ways. Let him go, but warn him that if he ever causes harm again, he will face divine retribution."

Reluctantly, Wukong untied the river demon and said:

"Listen carefully! If you dare to break your promise, I’ll come back and crush you with my staff!"

The river demon kowtowed repeatedly and said:

"I swear I will never harm anyone again. I will retreat to the depths of the river and live a life of peace."

With that, the demon dove back into the water and disappeared.

The next morning, the villagers gathered at the riverbank to thank the Tang Monk and his disciples. The head of the Chen family knelt before them and said:

"Great monks, you have saved my children and freed our village from this terrible curse. We are forever in your debt."

The Tang Monk blessed the family and said:

"Your suffering has ended. Remember to live virtuously and help one another. Evil thrives when good people remain silent."

The villagers prepared a feast to honor the travelers. After the meal, the Tang Monk and his disciples continued their journey westward, their hearts lightened by the knowledge that they had once again brought peace to the land.

**Chapter 68: Tang Monk Discusses Past Lives in Zhuzi Kingdom, Sun Wukong's Threefold Wisdom**

Virtue gathers all causes,  
Fame spreads across the four continents.  
With wisdom’s radiance, one crosses to the other shore,  
Swift winds rise,  
Clouds billow at the edge of the heavens.  
All Buddhas rejoice together,  
Eternally dwelling in the jade terrace for countless ages.  
Breaking the fleeting butterfly dream of the human world,  
Rest, rest,  
Cleanse the dust and shadows, leaving no sorrow behind.

This chapter begins as the Tang Monk and his disciples continue their journey westward. They leave behind the dusty and impure alleys and press on through serene roads. Time passes swiftly, and the heat of summer is upon them. The scenery around them reflects the season:

**“Pomegranate blossoms unfurl their brocade-like petals,  
Lotus leaves spread like green plates.  
Swallows flit among the willow trees,  
While travelers fan themselves to escape the heat.”**

As they proceed, they notice a city in the distance. Tang Monk reins in his horse and asks, "Disciples, what place is that?"

Sun Wukong replies, "Master, you don’t recognize the words on the flag over the city gate? How did you manage to leave the Tang court without knowing how to read?"

Tang Monk retorts, "I’ve been a monk since childhood and am well-versed in countless scriptures. Why do you insult me by saying I can’t read?"

Wukong points to the city and says, "Then why don’t you recognize the three large characters on the golden flag at the city gate? Isn’t that the name of the place?" Tang Monk squints and protests, "The flag is flapping wildly in the wind; even if there are characters, they’re impossible to read clearly!"

Wukong grins and says, "Strange, I can see it clearly."

Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing step in, siding with the monk. "Master, don’t listen to Elder Brother’s nonsense. From this distance, we can barely make out the city, let alone read any characters!"

Wukong chuckles, "Isn’t it clearly written as 'Zhuzi Kingdom'?"

Tang Monk says thoughtfully, "If this is Zhuzi Kingdom, it must be a western nation. We’ll need to exchange travel documents before continuing onward." Wukong waves dismissively, "No need to overthink it."

Soon, they arrive at the city gates. After crossing the bridge and entering the outer and inner gates, the group is struck by the grandeur of the capital city.

**The city’s magnificence is described as follows:**

**"The gate towers stand tall, their battlements neatly aligned.  
Living waters flow around the city,  
With lofty mountains mirrored north and south.  
Six streets and three markets teem with goods,  
A thousand households bustle with commerce.  
Indeed, this is the gathering place of kings,  
A heavenly metropolis, unrivaled in grandeur.  
Distant lands send envoys and treasures,  
While jade and silk overflow from all corners.  
The city’s mountains stretch endlessly,  
Its palace walls connect seamlessly with the heavens.  
The three gates are securely locked,  
Ensuring eternal peace and prosperity."**

As the disciples walk through the bustling streets, they notice that the people are well-dressed and refined in their speech and manners, comparable to those of the Tang Dynasty. However, the unusual appearances of Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and Sun Wukong attract intense curiosity.

Passersby abandon their business to gawk at Bajie’s grotesque, pig-like features, Wujing’s dark skin and towering frame, and Wukong’s hairy face and protruding brow. Tang Monk grows nervous and warns his disciples, "Don’t cause any trouble! Keep your heads down and walk quickly!"

Bajie obediently tucks his snout into his chest, while Wujing avoids looking up. Only Wukong remains carefree, scanning the surroundings as he follows closely behind the monk.

Some onlookers, recognizing the group’s peculiarities, retreat quietly. However, mischievous children and idle bystanders begin throwing stones and tiles at Bajie, treating him as a source of amusement. Tang Monk, sweating with anxiety, pleads, "Please don’t cause a scene!" Bajie endures the harassment quietly, unwilling to raise his head.

Eventually, the group turns a corner and comes across a building with a signboard that reads **"Meeting Hall."**

Tang Monk says, "Disciples, let’s enter this hall."

Wukong asks, "Why?"

Tang Monk explains, "A Meeting Hall is a place of hospitality for travelers from all lands. We can rest here temporarily while I seek an audience with the king to exchange our documents before continuing our journey."

Hearing this, Bajie brightens up and exclaims, "Master is right! Let’s hide inside and avoid these noisy people!"

Once inside, the commotion outside gradually subsides.

The hall is run by two officials, one senior and one junior. They are busy organizing laborers to receive visiting dignitaries when they notice the monk and his disciples entering. Alarmed by their strange appearances, they demand, "Who are you? Where are you going?"

Tang Monk respectfully joins his palms and replies, "I am a humble monk from the Tang Dynasty in the East. I was commissioned by His Majesty to journey westward to obtain scriptures. Passing through your noble land, I dare not trespass. I humbly request temporary lodging while I seek an audience with your king to exchange travel documents."

Hearing this, the two officials dismiss their attendants, straighten their attire, and come down to greet the monk courteously. They promptly arrange for a guest room and instruct their staff to prepare a vegetarian meal. Tang Monk thanks them for their hospitality.

Wukong, however, complains, "Why don’t they let us stay in the main hall?!"

Tang Monk explains, "This kingdom isn’t under Tang rule, nor does it share formal ties with our nation. Moreover, this hall likely hosts frequent visitors of high rank. It wouldn’t be appropriate for them to entertain us here."

Wukong smirks, "If that’s the case, I’ll make them treat us properly!"

Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a servant delivering a simple meal: **white rice, white flour, green vegetables, tofu, dried bamboo shoots, and black fungus.**

Tang Monk instructs his disciples to accept the meal graciously and thanks the servant. He then inquires, "Is the king currently in the palace?"

The servant replies, "Our Majesty has been bedridden for a long time and hasn’t attended court. However, today is an auspicious day, and he is holding a meeting with his ministers to issue a royal proclamation. If you wish to exchange travel documents, you should go immediately, or you may miss your chance."

Tang Monk decides to head to the palace without delay, instructing his disciples to remain in the hall and prepare a proper meal.

Tang Monk reaches the palace, marveling at its majestic architecture. After announcing his purpose to the gatekeeper, he is granted an audience with the king. However, the king is gravely ill and has been seeking medical help for years to no avail. Recognizing Tang Monk as a distinguished visitor from the Tang Dynasty, the king entrusts him with the task of healing him.

Meanwhile, back at the hall, Wukong devises a mischievous plan. He notices a royal proclamation posted in the city, calling for skilled doctors to treat the king’s illness. Despite having no medical training, Wukong decides to pose as a physician. Using his magical abilities, he secretly removes the proclamation and plants it in Bajie’s possession, setting the stage for a comedic yet dramatic chain of events...

**Tang Monk Meets the King of Zhuzi Kingdom**

After Tang Monk reaches the palace, he is greeted by the royal guards, who escort him to the audience hall. The king of Zhuzi Kingdom, weak and pale from his prolonged illness, is seated on a dragon throne. Despite his frailty, his regal presence commands respect. Tang Monk bows deeply and introduces himself:

"Your Majesty, I am a humble monk from the Great Tang in the east. I have been tasked by the Tang Emperor to journey westward to acquire sacred scriptures from the Thunderclap Monastery. Passing through your noble kingdom, I humbly request permission to exchange travel documents to continue my pilgrimage."

The king, hearing this, brightens slightly and says, "I have long heard of the Great Tang and its virtuous emperor. To meet a pilgrim from such a distant land is a rare privilege. However, I have been gravely ill for years, and none of my ministers or physicians have been able to cure me. If you, a holy monk, have any divine methods to alleviate my suffering, I would be eternally grateful."

Tang Monk, seeing the king’s genuine distress, replies humbly, "I am but a simple monk, neither a physician nor a healer. However, one of my disciples possesses extraordinary abilities. If Your Majesty permits, I will summon him to examine your illness."

The king nods eagerly and orders his attendants to prepare accommodations for Tang Monk and his disciples within the palace grounds. Tang Monk thanks the king and departs to fetch his companions.

**Sun Wukong's Plan to Cure the King**

Meanwhile, back at the Meeting Hall, Sun Wukong observes the bustling city streets through a window. He notices a royal proclamation posted on a nearby wall, which reads:

**"An Imperial Decree: The King of Zhuzi Kingdom is gravely ill. Any physician capable of curing him will be richly rewarded and honored as the kingdom’s benefactor. Those who fail will not be punished but must leave the palace immediately."**

Wukong grins mischievously and says to Zhu Bajie, "Second Brother, do you see that notice? The king is sick, and they’re looking for a doctor. Why don’t you go and try your luck?"

Bajie snorts, "Elder Brother, don’t make fun of me! I’m no doctor. Besides, if I fail, they’ll likely throw me out—or worse!"

Wukong laughs and teases, "With a snout like yours, you could sniff out any illness! Don’t be so timid."

Before Bajie can protest further, Tang Monk returns and relays the king’s request for help. Wukong immediately volunteers, saying, "Master, leave this to me. I’ll go see the king and cure his illness in no time."

Tang Monk hesitates and says, "Wukong, don’t be reckless. The king’s illness may be beyond mortal remedies."

Wukong grins confidently, "Don’t worry, Master. I have a plan."

**Wukong Diagnoses the King**

Wukong follows Tang Monk back to the palace. Upon entering the royal chamber, he observes the king closely. The king lies on a bed of fine silk, his face pale and his breathing shallow. Wukong steps forward, bows respectfully, and says, "Your Majesty, I am Sun Wukong, a disciple of the Tang Monk. I have some skill in diagnosing and curing illnesses. May I examine you?"

The king, desperate for relief, agrees. Wukong approaches, places his hand on the king’s wrist, and pretends to take his pulse. In truth, Wukong uses his sharp eyes and magical knowledge to assess the king’s condition. He quickly realizes that the illness is not natural but the result of a supernatural curse.

"Your Majesty," Wukong declares, "your illness is no ordinary ailment. It is caused by an external force—an evil spirit has afflicted you."

The king is startled and asks, "An evil spirit? How can this be?"

Wukong explains, "This spirit likely harbors a grudge against you or your kingdom. It has poisoned your essence, causing your current condition. Ordinary medicine will not cure you, but I can drive out the spirit with my abilities."

The king, both frightened and hopeful, says, "If you can rid me of this evil spirit, I will reward you with treasures and honor!"

Wukong waves his hand dismissively, "I do not seek riches or titles. I only wish to fulfill my duty as a disciple of the Tang Monk. Please rest while I prepare to exorcise this spirit."

**Wukong Sets a Trap for the Spirit**

Wukong leaves the royal chamber and gathers his companions to discuss the situation. He says, "This isn’t a typical illness—it’s the work of a demon. We need to lure the demon out and destroy it."

Zhu Bajie, always reluctant to face danger, grumbles, "Elder Brother, why do you always drag us into these messes? Can’t we just move on and leave this kingdom to its fate?"

Wukong retorts, "Second Brother, don’t be so selfish. If we don’t help the king, we won’t get the travel documents we need. Besides, defeating demons is what we do best."

Sha Wujing nods in agreement, "Elder Brother is right. What’s the plan?"

Wukong devises a strategy: He will use his magical powers to disguise himself as the king and lie in the royal bed. When the demon comes to feed on the king’s essence, Wukong will capture it and destroy it.

That night, Wukong transforms himself into an exact replica of the king and lies on the bed in the royal chamber. Tang Monk and the others wait outside the palace, anxiously hoping for Wukong’s success.

**The Demon Reveals Itself**

At the stroke of midnight, a cold wind sweeps through the palace. The candles flicker, and the air grows heavy with malice. Suddenly, a shadowy figure appears in the room. It is the demon—a malevolent spirit with glowing red eyes and a skeletal frame cloaked in dark mist.

The demon approaches the bed and reaches out to feed on the "king’s" life force. Just as its claws touch Wukong’s chest, he leaps up and shouts, "Got you, you wretched fiend!"

The demon screeches in surprise and tries to flee, but Wukong’s golden cudgel appears in his hand in an instant. With a single swing, he strikes the demon, sending it crashing into the wall.

The demon tries to fight back, summoning dark energy to attack Wukong. However, Wukong is too quick and powerful. After a fierce battle, Wukong smashes the demon’s head with his cudgel, destroying it completely.

**The King Is Healed**

With the demon vanquished, the cursed energy dissipates from the palace. The king awakens, feeling refreshed and stronger than he has in years. He calls for Tang Monk and his disciples and thanks them profusely.

"Great Monk," the king says, "you and your disciples have saved my life and my kingdom. I owe you a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid."

Tang Monk replies humbly, "Your Majesty, we are merely fulfilling our duty as pilgrims. Please grant us the travel documents we need to continue our journey westward."

The king immediately orders his ministers to prepare the documents and rewards the group with provisions for their journey. He also hosts a grand banquet in their honor.

**The Journey Continues**

With their mission in Zhuzi Kingdom complete, Tang Monk and his disciples bid farewell to the king and his court. They leave the city and continue their journey westward, once again facing the trials and tribulations of the road ahead.