**Chapter 1: The Divine Root Conceives and the Spring Breaks Forth**  
As the Heart Nature Forms, the Great Dao Arises

A poem says:  
When chaos was yet unformed, heaven and earth were in disorder,  
Like a hen's egg, opaque and obscure, no human witnessed.  
Then Pan Gu broke open the primordial chaos,  
And from that time the pure was distinguished from the turbid.  
The myriad beings looked up in gratitude to heaven's kindness,  
As all things were brought forth in goodness.  
If you would know the workings of creation's mighty power,  
Read this tale of the Journey to the West that frees from care.

It is said that the numbers of heaven and earth complete a cycle in 129,600 years, which makes one kalpa. This kalpa is divided into twelve phases, corresponding to the twelve earthly branches: Zi, Chou, Yin, Mao, Chen, Si, Wu, Wei, Shen, You, Xu, and Hai. Each phase lasts 10,800 years.

To illustrate using a single day: at Zi hour (midnight) the yang energy begins; at Chou the cock crows; at Yin there is no light yet; at Mao the sun rises; at Chen is after breakfast; at Si tasks are arranged; at Wu the sun is at its zenith; at Wei it moves westward; at Shen comes evening; at You the sun sets; at Xu comes twilight; and at Hai people rest.

When the cycle reaches the end of the Xu phase, heaven and earth return to darkness and all beings decline. After another 5,400 years, at the beginning of the Hai phase, all becomes black void, with neither humans nor creatures between heaven and earth - this is called chaos. After another 5,400 years, as Hai phase ends and the primal energy rises anew, approaching the Zi phase, light gradually returns. As the philosopher Shao Kangjie said: "At the winter solstice, at midnight, Heaven's heart remains unchanged. When the first yang stirs, the myriad things have yet to be born." At this point, Heaven first takes root.

After another 5,400 years, during the Zi phase, the pure and light rises up, forming the sun, moon, stars, and constellations. These are called the Four Images. Thus it is said Heaven opened in Zi. After another 5,400 years, as Zi phase ends and Chou phase approaches, things gradually become solid. The Book of Changes says: "How great is the primal power of Qian! How supreme is the primal power of Kun! All things receive life through them, in accordance with Heaven." At this point, Earth first congeals.

After another 5,400 years, during Chou phase, the heavy and turbid sinks down, forming water, fire, mountains, stone, and soil. These are called the Five Elements. Thus it is said Earth opened in Chou. After another 5,400 years, as Chou ends and Yin begins, the myriad things are born. The Calendar says: "Heaven's qi descends, Earth's qi rises; Heaven and Earth join, and all beings are born." At this point, Heaven is clear and Earth is fresh, as yin and yang unite.

After another 5,400 years, during Yin phase, humans, beasts, and birds are born - this is when the Three Powers of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity take their positions. Thus it is said Humans were born in Yin.

Since Pan Gu separated heaven and earth, through the rule of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, the world was divided into four great continents: Eastern Purvavideha, Western Aparagodaniya, Southern Jambudvipa, and Northern Uttarakuru. This book focuses on the Eastern Purvavideha.

Beyond the seas there was a country called Aolai. Near this country by the great sea stood a mountain called Flower Fruit Mountain. This mountain was the ancestor of all mountains, the source of all islands, formed when the pure and turbid were first divided, shaped after chaos was first split. What a magnificent mountain! A poem describes it:

Towering over the ocean vast,  
Ruling the jasper sea with might.  
When waves surge, silver mountains rise and fish dive deep;  
When billows roll, snow-white breakers stir and sea creatures flee.  
Wood and fire gathered high on its southern slope,  
A great peak rose from the Eastern Sea.  
Red cliffs and strange rocks,  
Steep walls and odd peaks.  
On the crimson cliffs phoenix pairs sing;  
Before the steep walls a unicorn rests alone.  
At the peak's tip golden pheasants crow,  
In stone caves dragons come and go.  
In the woods are immortal deer and sacred foxes,  
In the trees divine birds and crimson cranes.  
Rare flowers and precious herbs never wither,  
Green pines and bluish cypress stay forever spring.  
Immortal peaches always bear fruit,  
And bamboo often holds the clouds.  
A deep ravine thick with vines,  
Four sides of slopes fresh with grass.  
Truly this is where a hundred streams gather at heaven's pillar,  
The earth's root unchanging through ten thousand kalpas.

At the very top of this mountain was a magical rock. This rock was thirty-six feet five inches tall and twenty-four feet in circumference. The thirty-six foot five inch height corresponded to the 365 degrees of heaven, while the twenty-four foot circumference matched the twenty-four solar terms. The rock had nine openings and eight holes, corresponding to the Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams. No trees shaded it, but fragrant plants grew around it. Since the beginning of time, it had absorbed the essence of Heaven and Earth, the light of Sun and Moon. After long exposure, it developed spiritual powers. One day it split open and produced a stone egg, about the size of a ball.

Catching the wind, this egg transformed into a stone monkey with all five senses and four limbs complete. The monkey learned to crawl and walk, and bowed to the four directions. Two beams of golden light shot from his eyes up to the Palace of Heaven, startling the Jade Emperor, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, in his Treasure Palace of Heavenly Light. He ordered the Thousand-Mile Eye and Fair-Wind Ear to look toward the light's source.

The two officers looked and listened carefully, then reported back: "Your Majesty, the golden light comes from the Eastern Purvavideha Continent, from a stone monkey born of a magic rock on the Flower Fruit Mountain in the small country of Aolai. When he bowed to the four directions, his eyes shot forth this golden light that reached the palace." The Jade Emperor, in his mercy, said: "These creatures born of heaven and earth's essence are nothing unusual."

The monkey learned to run and leap, eat grass and fruits, drink from streams and pick flowers. He befriended wolves and tigers, made companions of leopards, played with deer, and lived as family with other monkeys. At night he slept under stone ridges, by day he wandered through mountain caves. As the saying goes: "In the mountains, there's no counting of seasons; when winter ends, who knows the year?"

One hot day, he and his monkey tribe sought shade under pine trees. Look at them all:

Jumping through trees, climbing branches, picking flowers and seeking fruits;  
Playing with pebbles and shells; building sand castles;  
Chasing dragonflies and catching butterflies;  
Bowing to the sky and worshipping Buddha;  
Pulling vines and weaving grass hats;  
Catching lice and cleaning fur;  
Pushing and shoving, rubbing and scratching;  
Pulling and tugging, fighting and playing;  
Under green pines they played as they pleased,  
By clear streams they washed at will.

After playing for a while, they went to bathe in a mountain stream. They saw the rushing water, truly like rolling melons splashing forth. As the ancient saying goes: "Birds have bird speech, beasts have beast language." The monkeys said, "We don't know where this water comes from. Today we have nothing to do - let's follow it upstream to its source!" They called out and set off together, following the stream up the mountain until they reached its source - a great waterfall. They saw:

A sheet of white rainbow rises,  
A thousand fathoms of snow-white waves fly;  
Sea winds cannot break it,  
Moon's reflection still depends on it.  
Cold air parts the blue peaks,  
Excess flow moistens the green slopes;  
This cascading waterfall  
Truly seems like hanging curtains.

The monkeys clapped their hands in joy, saying, "What wonderful water! It must flow from the mountain's foot all the way to the great sea!" They said, "Who dares to go through the waterfall to find what's behind it? Whoever can do this without getting hurt, we'll make him our king!" They called out three times, when suddenly the stone monkey jumped forward, saying, "I'll go! I'll go!" Indeed:

Today his great name shall be known,  
The time has come for his fate to unfold;  
By chance he dwells in this blessed place,  
Heaven sends him to enter the immortal realm.

Watch him as he closes his eyes, crouches down, and leaps through the waterfall. Opening his eyes and raising his head to look around, he finds no water or waves inside, but a clear iron bridge. He steadies himself and looks carefully - it's truly an iron bridge. The water rushes through holes beneath the bridge, falling outward to form a curtain. He ventures further onto the bridge, walking and looking around. It seems like someone's dwelling place - truly a wonderful spot. He sees:

Blue moss piled like indigo, white clouds floating like jade;  
Sunlight flickering through misty peaks, rain-washed cliffs glowing green;  
Empty windows in quiet rooms, smooth benches sprouting flowers;  
Dragon pearls hang in dripping caves, strange patterns cover the ground;  
Traces of fire near cliff-side stoves, remnants of food by stone tables;  
Stone seats and stone beds truly delightful, stone bowls and stone basins worth praise;  
A few stalks of bamboo in the rain, several plum trees in bloom;  
Green pines forever wet with dew, nature's dwelling complete.

After looking around for a while, he jumped to the middle of the bridge and saw a stone tablet. On it was inscribed: "Flower Fruit Mountain, Blessed Ground; Water Curtain Cave, Heaven's Palace." Overjoyed, the stone monkey quickly retreated, crouched down, and leaped back through the waterfall. He laughed heartily and exclaimed, "Wonderful! Wonderful!"

The other monkeys surrounded him and asked, "What's it like inside? How deep is the water?" The stone monkey replied, "There's no water! There's no water! There's an iron bridge, and beyond it is a place made by heaven and earth!" The monkeys asked, "How do you know it's heaven-made?" The stone monkey smiled and said, "This waterfall flows under an iron bridge and hangs down to hide the entrance. Behind the bridge are flowers and trees, and a stone house with stone bowls, stone pots, stone beds, and stone benches. In the middle is a stone tablet inscribed with 'Flower Fruit Mountain, Blessed Ground; Water Curtain Cave, Heaven's Palace.' This is truly our home! Inside it's quite spacious, enough to house thousands of us. Let's all move in and avoid the weather. Inside:

We can shelter from the wind,  
Find refuge from the rain.  
No fear of frost and snow,  
Never hear thunder's roar.  
Bright mists constantly shine,  
Auspicious air always surrounds.  
Pine and bamboo stay green year-round,  
Rare flowers bloom fresh each day."

The monkeys were delighted and said, "You go first, lead us in!" The stone monkey again closed his eyes, crouched down, and leaped in, calling, "Follow me! Follow me!" The braver monkeys jumped right in; the timid ones scratched their ears and rubbed their cheeks, howling and hesitating, but eventually all entered. They fought over bowls and pots, argued over stoves and beds, moving things here and there - such is monkey nature, never still - until they were exhausted.

The stone monkey sat above them and said, "Gentlemen, 'A man without credibility is worthless.' You promised that whoever could enter and leave safely would be your king. I've done just that, found this paradise for you all to live in comfort - why not make me king?" Hearing this, all the monkeys bowed in submission. They lined up according to age and bowed to him, calling him "Great King of Ten Thousand Years." From then on, the stone monkey became their king, dropping the word "stone" and calling himself Handsome Monkey King. A poem attests:

The Three Powers unite to produce all beings,  
A magic stone holds the essence of sun and moon.  
Born from an egg, the monkey completes the Great Way,  
Taking a false name to achieve immortality.  
Looking within, he knows no form,  
Outside he appears in visible shape.  
Throughout history all belong to this line,  
Free to call themselves king or sage.

The Handsome Monkey King led his subjects - monkeys of all kinds - and appointed ministers and officials. They played in Flower Fruit Mountain by day and slept in Water Curtain Cave by night, living in harmony, keeping apart from birds and beasts, ruling their own kingdom in joy. Thus:

In spring they gathered flowers for food,  
In summer they collected fruits to live,  
In autumn they harvested chestnuts and berries,  
In winter they searched for yellow-stemmed plants.

The Monkey King lived in pure happiness for three or four hundred years. But one day, during a feast with his subjects, he suddenly became sad and wept. The alarmed monkeys bowed and asked, "Great King, why are you troubled?" The Monkey King said, "Though I'm happy now, I'm worried about the future. That's why I'm troubled." The monkeys laughed, "Great King is so ungrateful! We live in this blessed mountain, this divine cave, not subject to the rule of unicorns or phoenixes, free from human authority, completely free and unfettered - what limitless happiness! Why worry about the future?"

The Monkey King said, "True, we're not bound by human laws today, nor do we fear beasts and birds, but in our old age we'll face King Yama of the underworld. When we die, won't we have lived in vain, unable to remain among the heavenly beings?"

Hearing this, all the monkeys covered their faces and wept, worrying about their mortality. Suddenly, from among them, a gibbon jumped out and called loudly, "Great King, with such thoughts, you truly show an awakened mind! Among all creatures, only three types escape King Yama's rule." The Monkey King asked, "Do you know which three?" The gibbon replied, "They are the Buddhas, the Immortals, and the Sages. These three escape the cycle of rebirth, never dying, never perishing, as eternal as heaven and earth." The Monkey King asked, "Where do they live?" The gibbon answered, "They dwell in this mortal world, in ancient caves on immortal mountains."

The Monkey King was overjoyed and said, "Tomorrow I shall leave you all and travel across the seas to seek the Way. I must find the method of immortality to escape King Yama's grasp." Ah! This single statement would lead him to leap from the web of mortality and eventually become the Great Sage Equal to Heaven. The monkeys all applauded, saying, "Excellent! Excellent! Tomorrow we'll gather fruits and delicacies and hold a farewell feast for our Great King!"

The next day, the monkeys gathered immortal peaches, mountain fruits, nuts, yellow herbs, fragrant plants, and rare flowers. They set out stone tables and benches, arranging immortal wine and food. See there:

Golden bullets and pearl pellets, red and yellow, ripe and plump;  
Golden bullets of winter cherries, sweet and beautiful;  
Red and yellow plums, tart and fragrant;  
Fresh dragon eyes with thin skins;  
Fire lychees with small pits and red flesh;  
Green crab apples offered on branches;  
Yellow loquats presented with leaves;  
Rabbit-head pears and chicken-heart jujubes to quench thirst;  
Sweet peaches and soft apricots like jade nectar;  
Crisp plums and sour cherries like divine cream;  
Red-chambered black-seeded watermelons;  
Four-pieced yellow-skinned persimmons;  
Split pomegranates showing fire-crystal seeds;  
Opened chestnuts revealing golden agates;  
Walnuts and ginkgo nuts for tea;  
Coconuts and grapes for wine;  
Pine nuts, cypress seeds piled high in plates;  
Oranges and sugarcane arranged on trays;  
Cooked mountain yams;  
Boiled yellow herbs;  
Crushed lingzhi and ground beans;  
Stone pot slowly simmering soup.  
Though human delicacies may be fine,  
How can they compare to monkeys' pure joy?

The monkey tribe honored their Handsome Monkey King in the highest seat, and each took their places by age. They passed wine, flowers, and fruits, feasting for a whole day. The next morning, the Monkey King rose early and said, "Little ones, make me a raft of old pine wood, find me a bamboo pole for a paddle, and prepare some fruits. I'm leaving." A raft was quickly made. The Monkey King boarded alone, pushed off with all his might, and rode the sea winds toward the Southern Jambudvipa Continent. This departure was truly:

Heaven-born divine monkey begins his great path,  
Leaves mountain on raft to ride heaven's wind.  
Crosses seas seeking immortal way,  
Sets his mind to achieve great deeds.  
With destiny and karma he leaves mundane wishes,  
Without worry or care he'll meet the dragon king.  
Surely he'll find one who knows his true nature,  
And learn the source of the myriad laws.

His destiny led him forward, and after many days, a southeast wind carried him to the northwest shore - the border of the Southern Jambudvipa Continent. Testing the water with his pole and finding it shallow, he abandoned his raft and leaped ashore. On the beach, he saw people fishing, hunting wild geese, gathering clams, and drying salt. He approached them and, playing a trick, made himself look like a fearsome creature, frightening them so they dropped their baskets and nets and fled in all directions. He caught one who couldn't run fast, stripped off his clothes, and put them on himself. Swaggering about, he wandered through cities and prefectures, learning human customs and speech. He ate by day and slept by night, seeking the way of immortality and the method of eternal life. But he saw that people were only concerned with profit and fame, with none caring for their true nature. As the saying goes:

When will the fight for fame and profit end?  
Rising early, sleeping late, never free!  
Riding donkeys but dreaming of fine steeds,  
As minister still hoping to be king.  
Consumed by work for food and clothes,  
Never fearing King Yama's hook!  
Planning riches for sons and grandsons,  
Not one person willing to turn back!

The Monkey King searched for the Way but found no opportunity. He traveled through South Jambudvipa for eight or nine years, along the Great Wall and through small counties. Suddenly, he reached the Western Ocean and thought there must be immortals beyond the sea. He made another raft and sailed across the Western Ocean until he reached the Western Aparagodaniya Continent. He searched everywhere until he came upon a tall, beautiful mountain with deep forests. Fearless of wolves or tigers, he climbed to the peak to look around. It was indeed a splendid mountain:

A thousand peaks brandish their spears,  
Ten thousand cliffs spread their screens.  
Sunlight through mist gently locks in green,  
Rain-washed slopes coldly hold their blue.  
Old vines wrap ancient trees,  
An ancient ferry marks a secluded path.  
Strange flowers and rare herbs,  
Tall bamboo and towering pines.  
Tall bamboo and towering pines  
Stay green for ten thousand years in this blessed place;  
Strange flowers and rare herbs  
Never wither in all four seasons, rivaling paradise.  
Wild birds sing nearby,  
Spring waters bubble clear.  
Layer upon layer of valleys wrapped in fragrance,  
Everywhere cliff walls covered in moss.  
The dragon veins in rising peaks show promise,  
Surely some great person hides their name here.

While looking around, he suddenly heard human voices deep in the woods. He quickly approached, pushed through the trees, and listened carefully. It was someone singing. The song went:

"Watching chess pieces decay, chopping wood dong-dong,  
Walking cloud paths by valley mouths;  
Selling firewood for wine,  
Laughing wildly at my own pleasure.  
On the green path in high autumn,  
Using pine roots as pillow beneath the moon,  
One sleep till dawn.  
Finding the old woods,  
Climbing cliffs crossing ridges,  
Axe in hand cutting dead vines.  
Gathering them into one load,  
Singing through the market,  
Trading for three measures of rice.  
No trace of competition,  
Prices fair and square,  
No clever schemes or calculations,  
No glory or shame,  
Living simply and naturally.  
Those I meet are either immortals or sages,  
Sitting quietly discussing the Yellow Court Classic."

The Monkey King was delighted, saying, "So immortals are hidden here!" He rushed inside for a closer look and saw it was a woodcutter chopping firewood. What strange attire he wore:

On his head, a bamboo hat made from new sprout sheaths;  
On his body, cloth clothes woven from tree cotton;  
Around his waist, a rope belt spun from old silkworm silk;  
On his feet, sandals woven from dried grass;  
In his hand, a steel axe;  
On his back, a hemp rope.  
Who could split pines and chop dead trees better than this woodcutter!

The Monkey King called out, "Venerable Immortal, your disciple pays respect!" The startled woodcutter dropped his axe and replied, "No, no! I'm just a poor man who can barely feed himself. How dare I accept the title 'Immortal'?" The Monkey King said, "If you're not an immortal, how do you speak immortal words?" The woodcutter asked, "What immortal words did I speak?" The Monkey King said, "Just now by the woods, I heard you sing 'Those I meet are either immortals or sages, sitting quietly discussing the Yellow Court Classic.' The Yellow Court Classic is a true immortal text - if you're not an immortal, what are you?"

The woodcutter laughed, "That song is indeed taught to me by an immortal. This immortal is my neighbor. Seeing how hard my life is and my daily troubles, he taught me to recite this song whenever I feel worried. It helps clear my mind and ease my burdens. I was just feeling troubled and reciting it when you overheard." The Monkey King asked, "If your home is next to an immortal's, why don't you learn the Way from him and seek immortality? Wouldn't that be better?"

The woodcutter replied, "My life has been bitter. Since childhood, I lost my father at eight or nine, leaving my widowed mother alone. I have no brothers or sisters, just myself to care for her. Now mother is old, and I dare not leave her. Moreover, our fields are barren, and we lack food and clothing. I can only cut firewood and sell it in the market for a few coins to buy rice. I cook and prepare meals myself to support my mother. That's why I cannot pursue immortality."

The Monkey King said, "From what you say, you are a filial son, and good fortune will surely come to you. But please tell me where this immortal lives - I'd like to visit him." The woodcutter said, "It's not far. This mountain is called Spirit Platform Mountain. In it there's a cave called Three Stars Cave. Inside lives an immortal named Subhuti Patriarch. His disciples are countless - even now he has thirty or forty studying under him. Follow that small path southward for seven or eight miles, and you'll reach his home."

The Monkey King grabbed the woodcutter's hand and said, "Brother, please come with me! If I succeed, I won't forget your kindness in showing the way." The woodcutter said, "You fool! Haven't you understood what I just told you? If I go with you, won't I lose my livelihood? Who will care for my old mother? I need to cut wood - you go on your own."

The Monkey King had to bid him farewell. Leaving the deep woods, he found the path and crossed a mountain slope. After about seven or eight miles, he indeed saw a cave dwelling. He stood straight and looked - what a magnificent place! He saw:

Colored mists scattered their hues, sun and moon cast their light.  
A thousand old cypresses, ten thousand tall bamboos.  
A thousand old cypresses, half-sky green in the rain;  
Ten thousand tall bamboos, whole-valley color in the mist.  
Outside the door, rare flowers spread brocade;  
By the bridge, celestial grass exhales fragrance.  
Blue cliffs jut out with wet moss;  
High walls rise with green lichen.  
Sometimes immortal cranes cry,  
Often phoenixes soar.  
When immortal cranes cry, their voice shakes distant skies;  
When phoenixes soar, their feathers shine five colors in the clouds.  
Dark apes and white deer appear and vanish,  
Golden lions and jade elephants roam freely.  
Looking closely at this blessed place,  
It truly rivals Heaven itself!

He saw the cave door tightly closed, with no sign of people. Turning back, he noticed a stone tablet on the cliff, about thirty feet high and eight feet wide, with ten large characters inscribed: "Spirit Platform Mountain, Three Stars Cave." The Handsome Monkey King was overjoyed, saying, "The people here are honest indeed! This is truly the mountain and cave!" He looked for a long time but dared not knock. Instead, he climbed a pine tree to eat pine seeds and play.

Soon after, he heard the door creak open, and a young immortal emerged. What a remarkable appearance:

Twin silk tufts bound in hair knots,  
Wide sleeves flowing in the wind.  
His form and face set him apart,  
His heart and appearance both transcend.  
An ageless guest beyond this world,  
An eternal youth in the mountains.  
Completely free of worldly dust,  
Let kalpas turn as they may.

The youth came out calling, "Who's making trouble here?" The Monkey King jumped down from the tree, bowed and said, "Immortal boy, I am a seeker of the Way, come to learn immortality. I wouldn't dare make trouble." The boy smiled, "So you're seeking the Way?" The Monkey King replied, "Yes." The boy said, "My master was just sitting down and suddenly told me to open the door, saying there was someone seeking the Way outside. That must be you." The Monkey King smiled, "Indeed, it's me." The boy said, "Follow me in."

The Monkey King tidied his clothes and followed the boy deep into the cave, passing through layers of jade chambers and pearl towers, countless quiet rooms and secluded dwellings, until they reached the Emerald Platform. There sat Subhuti Patriarch on the platform, with thirty lesser immortals standing in rows below. Truly he was:

A great enlightened golden immortal of pure form,  
The Western wonder, Patriarch Subhuti;  
Neither born nor dying, following the Three-Three Practice,  
All spirit all divine, with countless mercies.  
Naturally empty yet following transformations,  
True nature acting freely as it will;  
Majestic body eternal as heaven,  
Through ages enlightening hearts, great dharma master.

The Monkey King prostrated himself, kowtowing countless times, saying, "Master! Master! Your disciple pays sincere respect!" The Patriarch said, "Where are you from? Speak clearly of your homeland and name before you bow again." The Monkey King replied, "Your disciple is from the Flower Fruit Mountain in the Water Curtain Cave of the Aolai Country in the Eastern Purvavideha Continent."

The Patriarch angrily ordered, "Drive him out! He's a fraud and a liar - how could he learn any true Way!" The Monkey King frantically kowtowed, saying, "Your disciple speaks the absolute truth, without any deception!" The Patriarch said, "If you're telling the truth, how did you come from the Eastern Purvavideha Continent? Between there and here are two great seas and the Southern Jambudvipa Continent - how did you get here?" The Monkey King, still kowtowing, replied, "I sailed across oceans and traveled through many lands for over ten years before finally finding this place."

The Patriarch said, "So you came gradually - that's acceptable. What is your surname?" The Monkey King replied, "I have no surname. If people scold me, I don't get angry; if they hit me, I don't get mad - I just bow and let it pass. I've never had a surname." The Patriarch said, "I'm not asking about that kind of nature. What surname did your parents give you?" The Monkey King said, "I have no parents either." The Patriarch said, "If you have no parents, did you grow from a tree?" The Monkey King replied, "Though not from a tree, I was born from a stone. I only remember there was a magic stone on Flower Fruit Mountain. That year the stone split open, and I was born."

Hearing this, the Patriarch secretly rejoiced, thinking, "This one is truly born of heaven and earth." He said, "Stand up and walk around so I can see you." The Monkey King jumped up and walked around awkwardly. The Patriarch laughed, "Though your form is ugly, you look like a pi-hun [monkey]. I'll give you a surname based on your appearance. Since 'pi' without its animal radical is the character for 'old,' and 'hun' without its animal radical means 'masculine,' neither suits you. You shall have the surname 'Sun.' The character 'sun' fits you perfectly - you will be called Sun Wukong."

The Monkey King was overjoyed, kowtowing again, "Wonderful! Wonderful! Now I know my surname! Please, Master, in your mercy, since I have a surname, give me a proper name to be called by." The Patriarch said, "Our school has twelve characters for naming disciples. You are of the tenth generation, receiving the character 'Wu.'" The Monkey King asked, "What are the twelve characters?" The Patriarch replied, "They are: Guang, Da, Zhi, Hui, Zhen, Ru, Xing, Hai, Ying, Wu, Yuan, and Jue. Your generation gets 'Wu.' I'll give you the religious name 'Sun Wukong' - how's that?" The Monkey King laughed and said, "Excellent! Excellent! From now on I'll be called Sun Wukong!"

Indeed:  
When the primal chaos first split, no names existed;  
To break through stubborn emptiness, one must become aware.

To learn what cultivation he practiced and what achievements he attained, listen to the next chapter's explanation.

**Chapter 7: The Great Sage Escapes from the Eight-Trigram Furnace**  
The Mind-Ape is Fixed Beneath the Five Elements Mountain

A verse:  
Wealth and fame are fixed by former karma,  
Let no one deceive their heart.  
Upright and bright,  
The fruits of loyalty and goodness run deep.  
A little arrogance brings heaven's punishment,  
Success may not come now but waits its time.  
Ask the Eastern Lord why  
Misfortune now invades.  
Only because ambition reached too high,  
Ignoring rank and breaking rules.

The story tells that the Great Sage Equal to Heaven was taken by the heavenly armies to the execution platform and tied to the demon-subduing pillar. They hacked with knives, chopped with axes, stabbed with spears, and sliced with swords, but could not harm him. The Star of the Southern Dipper ordered the fire gods to burn him, but the flames could not touch him. Then the thunder gods were commanded to strike him with thunderbolts, but still could not harm a single hair. The powerful demon kings reported to the Jade Emperor: "Your Majesty, we don't know what kind of body-protection method this Great Sage has learned. Our knives, axes, thunder, and fire cannot harm him at all. What should we do?"

The Jade Emperor heard this and asked, "What shall we do with this creature?" The Supreme Lord Laozi immediately said, "This monkey ate the peaches, drank the imperial wine, and stole my elixir pills - I had five gourds of pills, both processed and unprocessed, and he ate them all. The Three-Fold Fire has refined them into one mass in his body, making it as hard as diamond. No weapon can harm him. Let me take him and put him in my Eight-Trigram Furnace. Using both gentle and fierce fires, I'll refine out my pills, and his body will naturally turn to ashes."

Hearing this, the Jade Emperor ordered the Six Ding and Six Jia gods to untie him and hand him over to Laozi. After Laozi left with his charge, the Jade Emperor summoned Erlang the Truth Seeker to reward him with a hundred golden flowers, a hundred bottles of imperial wine, a hundred immortality pills, and various precious jewels and silks, to share with his sworn brothers. The True Lord thanked him and returned to the River of Heaven's Ford.

Laozi took the Great Sage to his Tushita Palace, removed his bonds and the instrument piercing his chest, and pushed him into the Eight-Trigram Furnace. He ordered the furnace-watching immortals and fire-tending boys to stoke the flames. The furnace had eight positions: Qian, Kan, Gen, Zhen, Xun, Li, Kun, and Dui. The Great Sage squeezed himself under the Xun position. Xun represents wind, and where there's wind, fire cannot burn. Only smoke bothered him, making his eyes red and watery - this is why they became known as "Fiery Eyes with Golden Pupils."

Time passed quickly, and after forty-nine days, Laozi's fire-refining was complete. One day, when opening the furnace to retrieve the pills, the Great Sage was rubbing his smoke-irritated eyes when he heard the furnace lid moving. His eyes suddenly opened to see light, and he couldn't help himself - he leaped out of the furnace, kicked over the Eight-Trigram Furnace, and ran outside. The furnace watchers and fire tenders tried to stop him, but he knocked them all down, like an epileptic white-browed tiger or a mad single-horned dragon. Laozi tried to grab him but was thrown head over heels. The Great Sage escaped, pulled the As-You-Will Rod from his ear, waved it in the wind until it grew as thick as a bowl, and once again wreaked havoc in the Heavenly Palace, causing the Nine Bright Stars to shut their doors and the Four Heavenly Kings to vanish.

What a monkey spirit! A poem describes:  
His pure original body fits with primal heaven,  
Through countless kalpas naturally so.  
Vast and formless, the Great Ultimate complete,  
Still and unmoved, called the Primordial Mystery.  
Long refined in the furnace, beyond lead and mercury,  
Beyond all things, an immortal from the start.  
Endless transformations still transforming,  
Beyond all talk of precepts and commands.

Another poem:  
A point of spirit light pierces the great void,  
Like that staff he carries everywhere:  
Long or short as the user needs,  
Laid flat or upright at his will.

And another:  
The ape's true nature borrows human heart,  
Heart and ape's meaning both run deep.  
"Great Sage Equal to Heaven" is no empty title,  
Though "Protector of the Horses" missed his tune.  
Horse and ape together, heart and mind as one,  
Bind them tight, seek not outside.  
All forms return to one principle true,  
As Tathagata dwells in double grove.

This time, the Monkey King attacked indiscriminately with his iron rod, and no deity could stop him. He fought all the way to the Hall of Perfect Light and the Hall of Divine Mists. Fortunately, Wang the Spirit Officer, assistant to the Blessed Spirit True Lord, was guarding the hall. Seeing the Great Sage's rampage, he brandished his golden whip and blocked his way, saying, "Insolent monkey, where do you think you're going? I am here - don't you dare act wild!"

The Great Sage didn't waste words but raised his rod to strike. The Spirit Officer raised his whip to meet him. They fought before the Hall of Divine Mists in a magnificent battle:

The loyal and righteous earn great fame,  
While those who deceive Heaven lose their name.  
By chance they meet in equal match,  
As heroes and champions test their might.  
The iron rod fierce, the golden whip swift,  
How can the righteous and just endure?  
One is the Mighty Spirit of Perfect Yang,  
One is the monkey monster Great Sage.  
Golden whip and iron rod show their skill,  
Both divine weapons from Heaven's halls.  
Today they display their might at Heaven's gate,  
Each showing talents truly admirable.  
One's treacherous heart seeks to seize the Palace of Stars,  
One strives to protect the realm of sages.  
Fighting without yield, showing divine powers,  
Whip and rod exchange blows without victory.

As they fought without clear winner, the Blessed Spirit True Lord sent orders to the Thunder Bureau to dispatch thirty-six thunder generals. They surrounded the Great Sage, each displaying fierce might in battle. The Great Sage showed no fear at all, wielding his As-You-Will Rod to block left and right, guard back and front. Seeing the thunder generals' weapons closing in - their swords, spears, axes, halberds, clubs, hammers, battle-axes, and moon blades - he transformed himself, growing three heads and six arms. With a shake, his rod became three rods, and his six hands wielded them like spinning wheels, whirling within the encirclement. The thunder gods couldn't get near him. Truly:

Round and bright, gleaming with light,  
Since ancient times, who could learn this art?  
Fire cannot burn nor water drown,  
A bright mani pearl that weapons cannot harm.  
Can be good, can be evil,  
Good and evil follow his will.  
In goodness becomes Buddha or immortal,  
In evil grows fur and horns.  
Endless transformations disturb Heaven's palace,  
Thunder generals and divine soldiers cannot catch him.

Though the gods had him surrounded, they couldn't approach. Their chaotic battle alarmed the Jade Emperor, who ordered the Chess-Playing Spirit Officer and the Assistant Sage True Lord to go west and invite the Buddha to subdue him.

The two saints received the order and went straight to the Spirit Mountain's blessed realm, before the Thunder Monastery. They greeted the Four Diamond Kings and Eight Bodhisattvas and asked them to relay their message. The gods took them to the foot of the Lotus Platform to inform the Buddha, who summoned them. The two saints bowed three times to the Buddha and stood beside the platform. The Buddha asked, "Why has the Jade Emperor sent you here?"

The two saints replied, "Some time ago, a monkey was born on the Flower Fruit Mountain who has been causing chaos with his magic powers, gathering monkey tribes to disturb the world. The Jade Emperor sent a decree to pacify him and made him 'Protector of the Horses,' but he despised the low rank and left. When King Li and Prince Nezha were sent to capture him, they failed. He was then pacified again and made 'Great Sage Equal to Heaven,' a title without duties. Put in charge of the Peach Garden, he stole the peaches; then he went to the Jade Pool, stole food and wine, and disrupted the great feast. Drunk, he secretly entered the Tushita Palace and stole Laozi's pills, then fled from Heaven.

"The Jade Emperor sent 100,000 heavenly troops but couldn't subdue him. Later, Guanyin recommended Erlang and his sworn brothers to pursue and kill him. Though he could transform in many ways, thanks to Laozi's Diamond Snare hitting him, Erlang finally captured him. Brought before the Jade Emperor, he was sentenced to death. But knives couldn't cut him, axes couldn't chop him, fire couldn't burn him, and thunder couldn't strike him. Laozi requested to take him and refine him in his furnace. After forty-nine days, when the furnace was opened, he jumped out, knocked over the Eight-Trigram Furnace, defeated the heavenly guards, and reached the Hall of Perfect Light and Divine Mist Hall. There, the Spirit Officer Wang, assistant to the Blessed Spirit True Lord, engaged him in fierce battle. Thirty-six thunder generals were summoned to surround him, but none could get near. In this emergency, the Jade Emperor has specially requested the Buddha to save the situation."

Hearing this, the Buddha said to all the Bodhisattvas, "Remain seated quietly in this dharma hall, keeping your meditation positions undisturbed, while I go to subdue this demon."

The Buddha called upon Ananda and Kashyapa to accompany him, left Thunder Monastery, and arrived outside the Gate of Divine Mists. There they heard battle cries - the thirty-six thunder generals were still surrounding the Great Sage. The Buddha issued a divine command: "Thunder generals, cease your fighting. Open your formation and let me question this Great Sage about his powers." The generals withdrew, and the Great Sage also put away his transformation, showing his original form. Angrily approaching with raised voice, he shouted, "What kind of sage are you to dare stop this battle and question me?"

The Buddha smiled and said, "I am Sakyamuni from the Western Paradise, Amitabha Buddha. I've heard you've been causing trouble and repeatedly rebelling against Heaven. I don't know where you were born, when you achieved the Way, and why you're being so violent?"

The Great Sage replied, "I am:  
A divine immortal born of Heaven and Earth,  
An old monkey from the Flower Fruit Mountain.  
Water Curtain Cave is my home,  
Where I learned mysteries from friends and teachers.  
Mastered many arts of long life,  
Learned transformations without bound.  
Tired of the narrow mortal world below,  
I determined to dwell in Heaven above.  
The Divine Mists Palace isn't his forever,  
Through ages kings have passed it down.  
The strong should rule - it should be mine,  
What hero dares compete with me?"

The Buddha laughed coldly and said, "You're just a monkey who gained awareness. How dare you scheme to take the Jade Emperor's position? He has cultivated for 1,750 kalpas, each kalpa lasting 129,600 years. Calculate how many years that is! You're just a beast who recently gained human form - how dare you speak such wild words! You're not even worthy to be called human! Your life span will be cut short! Quickly submit and stop this nonsense, or you'll meet a poisonous end. What a shame to waste your true nature!"

The Great Sage said, "Although he has cultivated for a long time, he shouldn't monopolize this position forever. As the saying goes, 'Emperors take turns; next year it will be my family's turn.' He should just move out and let me have the Heavenly Palace, and that would settle it. If he won't yield, I'll keep causing chaos, and there will never be peace!"

The Buddha said, "Besides your ability to transform and live long, what other powers do you have that make you worthy of occupying Heaven's palace?" The Great Sage replied, "I have many abilities! I have seventy-two transformations and am immortal. I can ride my cloud somersault that travels 108,000 miles in a single leap. Why shouldn't I sit on the Heavenly throne?"

The Buddha said, "Let's make a bet. If you can leap out of my right palm, I'll tell the Jade Emperor to move to the West and give you the Heavenly Palace. If you can't, you must return to Earth as a demon and cultivate for more eons before causing more trouble."

Hearing this, the Great Sage secretly laughed, "This Buddha is so foolish! I can leap 108,000 miles, and his palm isn't even a foot wide. How could I not jump out of it?" He quickly said, "Do you mean what you say?" The Buddha replied, "I do! I do!" and stretched out his right hand, which looked about the size of a lotus leaf.

The Great Sage put away his As-You-Will Rod, gathered his power, and jumped onto the Buddha's palm, saying, "I'm off!" He soared away in a beam of cloud light, formless and shadowless. The Buddha watched him with his wisdom eyes as the Monkey King spun like a windmill, constantly moving forward. Suddenly, the Great Sage saw five pink pillars reaching into the sky with green mist between them. He thought, "This must be the end of the road. I'll go back now, and the Buddha will have to witness that the Heavenly Palace should be mine." Then he thought, "Wait! I should leave some proof to show the Buddha." He pulled out a hair, blew his immortal breath on it, and called "Transform!" It became a brush pen filled with ink. On the middle pillar, he wrote "The Great Sage Equal to Heaven was here." Not content with just that, he even urinated at the base of the first pillar. Then he turned his cloud somersault back and landed on the Buddha's palm, saying, "I've been there and back. Tell the Jade Emperor to give me the Heavenly Palace."

The Buddha scolded, "You stinking monkey! You haven't left my palm!" The Great Sage said, "You don't know. I went to the edge of Heaven where I saw five flesh-colored pillars holding up a green sky. I even left a mark there - want to go see?" The Buddha said, "No need. Just look down."

The Great Sage opened his fiery golden eyes and looked down. There on the Buddha's middle finger was written "The Great Sage Equal to Heaven was here," and at the base of his thumb was the smell of monkey urine. The Great Sage was shocked: "How can this be? How can this be? I wrote this on the pillars at Heaven's edge. How did it get on his finger? Could he have some magic that knows things before they happen? I don't believe it! I don't believe it! Let me go again!"

The impetuous Great Sage tried to leap out again, but the Buddha turned his palm over and pushed him out through the Western Gate of Heaven. His five fingers transformed into the Five Elements Mountains - Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth - forming a range called the Five Elements Mountain, and gently pressed down on him. The thunder gods and Ananda and Kashyapa clasped their hands and praised:

"Wonderful! Wonderful!  
Born from an egg, learned to be human,  
Set on cultivation, found the true Way.  
Unchanging through ages in blessed realm,  
One moment's change scattered his spirit.  
Deceived Heaven, coveted high position,  
Stole pills, broke laws, disturbed great order.  
Now evil deeds bring just reward,  
Who knows when he'll rise again?"

After the Buddha eliminated the demon monkey, he called Ananda and Kashyapa to return to the Western Paradise. Just then, Heavenly Generals Peng and You rushed out from the Divine Mists Hall, saying, "Please wait, Buddha, our Lord's chariot approaches." The Buddha turned to look. Soon they saw the Eight-Splendor Phoenix Carriage and Nine-Light Precious Canopy, with celestial music playing and divine verses chanting. Precious flowers scattered and true incense wafted as it approached the Buddha. The Jade Emperor thanked him: "We are deeply grateful for your great dharma power in subduing the evil demon. Please stay one day while we hold a feast with all immortals to thank you."

The Buddha dared not refuse and joined his palms in thanks: "This humble monk came at the Great Heavenly Lord's command - what power do I have? It was all due to the Heavenly Lord's and all gods' great fortune." The Jade Emperor ordered the cloud spirits to invite the Three Pure Ones, Four Rulers, Five Elders, Six Departments, Seven Origins, Eight Extremities, Nine Stars, Ten Regions, and all immortals to the feast to thank the Buddha. He also commanded the Four Great Heavenly Teachers and Nine Heavenly Fairies to open the Jade Capital's Golden Gates, Supreme Mystery's Treasure Palace, and Yang Cave Jade Hall, and invite the Buddha to sit high on the Seven-Treasure Spirit Platform. They arranged seats for all and prepared delicacies of dragon liver and phoenix marrow, with jade nectar and immortal peaches.

Soon, the Pure Jade First Principal, Supreme Pure Spirit Treasure, and Grand Pure Way Virtue Lords arrived, along with the Five Qi True Lords, Five Constellation Lords, Three Officials, Four Saints, Nine Star Lords, Left Assistant, Right Assistant, Heavenly Kings, Nezha, and all spiritual beings. In pairs they came with banners and canopies, bearing bright pearls and strange treasures, immortal fruits and rare flowers. They bowed to the Buddha saying, "We thank the Buddha's limitless dharma power for subduing the demon monkey. The Great Heavenly Lord has set this feast and called us all to express thanks. Please give this gathering a name."

The Buddha accepted the gods' request and said, "Since you ask for a name, let's call it the 'Grand Festival of Heaven's Peace.'" All the immortal elders spoke in unison, "Excellent name! 'Grand Festival of Heaven's Peace'!" With that, they took their seats, passed wine cups, wore flowers, and played music - truly a magnificent feast. A poem proves it:

The Peach Banquet disrupted by monkey's chaos,  
Heaven's Peace Festival surpasses the Peach Feast.  
Dragon flags and phoenix carriages spread auspicious light,  
Precious banners and holy pennants float with blessed air.  
Immortal music and mystic songs sound sweet,  
Phoenix flutes and jade pipes ring high.  
Fragrant smoke circles as immortals gather,  
The cosmos at peace celebrates the sacred court.

All enjoyed the feast when suddenly the Queen Mother arrived, leading immortal maidens and fairies, floating gracefully to dance before the Buddha. They bowed and said, "The monkey previously disrupted our Peach Banquet. Now thanks to the Buddha's great power chaining the stubborn monkey, we celebrate the Heaven's Peace Festival. We have nothing to offer but these fresh-picked large peaches from our greatest trees." Indeed:

Half red and half green, exhaling sweet fragrance,  
Splendid immortal roots ten thousand years old.  
The peach trees of Wuling's stream can't compare,  
Heaven's garden holds far stranger strength.  
Purple veins so tender, rare in this world,  
Golden cores so sweet, none can match.  
Extending life and years, transforming the body,  
Those fated to eat them are truly blessed.

The Buddha joined palms to thank the Queen Mother. She then had her fairy maidens sing and dance. All the gathered immortals praised them. Truly:

Heaven's ethereal fragrance fills all seats,  
Scattered immortal petals, immortal flowers.  
Jade Capital's Golden Gates show great glory,  
Strange treasures and rare jewels beyond price.  
Paired immortals match Heaven's age,  
Doubles increase through myriad kalpas.  
Let seas change to mulberry fields,  
They stay unshocked, unalarmed.

While the Queen Mother's fairy maidens sang and danced, and cups were passed around, suddenly they smelled:

A strange fragrance reaching their noses,  
Startling all stars and constellations at the feast.  
Heaven's immortals and Buddha pause their cups,  
All raise their heads to look and wait.  
Through the galaxy appears an old man,  
Holding spirit mushrooms, flying through mists.  
His gourd holds ten thousand years of pills,  
His records list thousand-year lives.  
Space and time within his cave are free,  
Sun and moon in his pot follow his will.  
Roaming four seas in pure leisure,  
Wandering ten continents at ease.  
Often attended the Peach Banquets drunk,  
Woke to find bright moon unchanged.  
Tall ears, big head, short body,  
From South Pole comes Old Star of Long Life.

The Star of Longevity arrived. After greeting the Jade Emperor and the Buddha, he expressed his thanks: "I first heard that the demon monkey was taken to be refined in Laozi's furnace at the Tushita Palace, and thought surely all would be peaceful. Unexpectedly, he escaped again. Thankfully, the Buddha skillfully subdued this monster and set this feast in gratitude. That's why I came when I heard the news. I have nothing else to offer but these purple spirit mushrooms and blue lotus roots, golden pills and immortal herbs." A poem says:

Blue lotus and golden pills offered to Buddha,  
May the Tathagata's life span be like the Ganges sand.  
Pure peace and eternal joy like three-colored brocade,  
Health and long life like nine-grade flowers.  
In the formless gate dwells the true Dharma King,  
In the realm of form and emptiness is immortal home.  
All under heaven call him ancestor,  
The golden body sixteen feet tall brings blessings long.

The Buddha gladly accepted the gift. The Star of Longevity took his seat, and wine cups continued to be passed. Then they saw the Barefoot Immortal arrive. He bowed to the Jade Emperor, then thanked the Buddha: "I deeply appreciate your divine power in subduing the demon monkey. I have nothing to show my respect but these two pears of immortality and some fire dates." A poem says:

The Barefoot Immortal's dates and pears spread fragrance,  
Offering to Amitabha for long life.  
Seven-treasure lotus platform steady as mountains,  
Thousand-gold flower seat adorned like brocade.  
Life matches heaven and earth, no empty words,  
Fortune like vast waves, not wild talk.  
Fortune and life truly come together,  
In pure leisure's extreme joy of the Western Paradise.

The Buddha thanked him again. He ordered Ananda and Kashyapa to collect all the offerings. Then he rose to thank the Jade Emperor for the feast. All were quite drunk when a patrolling deity reported, "The Great Sage has stuck his head out." The Buddha said, "No matter, no matter." From his sleeve he took out a strip of paper with six golden words: "Om mani padme hum." He gave it to Ananda and told him to paste it on the mountain top. The disciple took the paper, went out the Heaven Gate, and firmly stuck it on a square stone atop the Five Elements Mountain. The mountain immediately took root and sealed together, though it allowed breathing space and left room for the monkey's hands to move. Ananda returned to report, "The paper has been pasted."

The Buddha then bid farewell to the Jade Emperor and all immortals. Outside Heaven's Gate, he showed more mercy by reciting true words and summoning an earth deity to live at the mountain with the Five Directional Spirits to guard it. When the monkey was hungry, they were to feed him iron pellets; when thirsty, molten copper to drink. They would wait until his sin was paid, when someone would come to rescue him. A poem says:

The bold monkey rebelled against Heaven's Palace,  
But Buddha's hand subdued him at last.  
Thirsty he drinks molten copper through the years,  
Hungry he eats iron pellets to pass time.  
Heaven's punishment brings bitter torment,  
Human fate brings lonely misery.  
If a hero comes to free him again,  
He'll follow Buddha to the Western Paradise.

Another poem says:  
Showing off his mighty strength caused great trouble,  
Subduing dragons and tigers with clever skill.  
Stealing peaches and wine through Heaven's palace,  
Accepting rank and grace in the Jade Capital.  
Evil deeds filled up, body now trapped,  
Good roots not cut off, spirit will rise again.  
If he truly escapes Buddha's palm one day,  
Wait for Tang's holy monk to come.

We don't know in which year or month his punishment will end - listen to the next chapter's explanation.

**Chapter 15: At Snake-Coil Mountain, Various Gods Give Secret Aid**  
At Eagle-Grief Stream, Mind and Horse Are Reined

The story tells of Sun Wukong serving Tang Monk as they traveled west. After several days' journey, it was the cold winter month, with fierce north winds and slippery ice. They traveled through treacherous paths of steep cliffs and dangerous mountain ridges. Tang Monk, riding his horse, heard the rushing sound of water and called back, "Wukong, where is that water sound coming from?" Wukong replied, "I remember this place is called Snake-Coil Mountain's Eagle-Grief Stream. That must be the stream's water." Before he finished speaking, they reached the stream bank. Tang Monk pulled his reins to look, and saw:

Crystal currents pierce clouds above,  
Clear waves reflect red sunlight.  
Night rain sounds echo through hidden valleys,  
Morning mists blind vast skies.  
Thousand-foot waves spray shattered jade,  
Single stream roars in pure wind.  
Waters flow to endless misty waves,  
Where gulls and herons forget fishing spots.

As master and disciple were watching, suddenly there was a splash from the stream, and a dragon emerged, churning waves and leaping from the cliff, lunging at the master. Frightened, Wukong dropped the luggage, grabbed his master off the horse, and retreated. The dragon couldn't catch them but swallowed the white horse, complete with saddle and bridle, in one gulp, then submerged back into the water. Wukong led his master to a high spot to sit, then went to fetch the horse and luggage. He found only the luggage; the horse was gone. He brought the luggage to his master and said, "Master, that evil dragon has vanished, but it scared away our horse." Tang Monk said, "Disciple, how can we find the horse?"

Wukong said, "Don't worry, let me look." He let out a whistle and leaped into the air. With his fiery eyes and golden pupils, he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked in all directions, but couldn't see any trace of the horse. He descended and reported, "Master, our horse was definitely eaten by that dragon. I can't see it anywhere." Tang Monk said, "Disciple, how big a mouth could that creature have to swallow such a large horse with its saddle and bridle? Perhaps it was startled and ran into some mountain valley. Look again carefully."

Wukong said, "You don't know my abilities. These eyes of mine can see good and bad fortune up to a thousand miles away in broad daylight. Within that thousand miles, I can even see a dragonfly spread its wings - how could I miss a big horse?" Tang Monk said, "If it really ate the horse, how can I continue forward? Alas! How can I cross these countless waters and mountains on foot?" As he spoke, tears fell like rain.

Seeing him cry, Wukong couldn't contain his quick temper and shouted, "Master, don't be such a weakling! Just sit here while old Sun goes to find that creature and make him return our horse!" Tang Monk grabbed him and said, "Disciple, where will you look for him? What if he suddenly leaps out and harms me too? If both person and horse are lost, what then?"

Hearing these words, Wukong grew even angrier and shouted like thunder, "You're too useless! Useless! You want a horse to ride but won't let me go look - shall we just sit here watching the luggage until we grow old?"

As he was grumbling and shouting, unable to calm his anger, suddenly they heard voices from the sky saying, "Great Sage Sun, don't be angry; Venerable Tang, don't cry. We are divine guardians sent by Guanyin Bodhisattva to secretly protect the scripture seekers." The Master hurriedly bowed upon hearing this. Wukong said, "Which ones are you? Report your names so I can check." The gods replied, "We are the Six Ding and Six Jia Gods, the Five Directional Deities, the Four Duty Gods, and the Eighteen Guardians of Buddhism, each taking turns to guard you day and night."

Wukong asked, "Who's on duty today?" The Directional Deities answered, "The Ding and Jia Gods, Duty Gods, and Guardians take turns. We Five Directional Deities - particularly the Golden-Headed Deity - stay by your side day and night." Wukong said, "In that case, those not on duty may withdraw. Let the Six Ding Gods, today's Duty God, and the Directional Deities stay to protect my master while old Sun finds that stream dragon and makes him return our horse."

The gods complied. Tang Monk finally felt at ease and sat on the rocky cliff. He cautioned Wukong to be careful. Wukong said, "Just relax." The good monkey king tightened his cotton robe, hitched up his tiger-skin skirt, gripped his golden-hooped rod, gathered his spirit, and went straight to the stream bank. Half in cloud and half in mist, he stood above the water and shouted, "You mud loach! Return my horse! Return my horse!"

Now, that dragon had swallowed Tang Monk's white horse and was resting at the bottom of the stream, cultivating his spirit. Hearing someone shouting and demanding the horse, he couldn't contain his anger. He quickly leaped up, churning waves, and emerged saying, "Who dares to shout insults at me?" Seeing him, Wukong roared, "Don't run! Return my horse!" He swung his rod, aiming for the dragon's head. The dragon extended his claws to grab him. The two fought by the stream bank in a truly fierce battle:

The dragon extends sharp claws,  
The monkey raises his golden hoop.  
One with beard like white jade threads,  
One with coat like red gold lamp.  
One's beard sprays bright pearls and colored mist,  
One's hand wields iron staff stirring wild wind.  
One is a wayward son who betrayed his parents,  
One is a sage who defied Heaven's court.  
Both suffered hardships through their trials,  
Now each strives to prove his worth.

Coming and going, they fought for a long time. After many rounds, the dragon's strength weakened and muscles tired. Unable to resist, he turned and dove back into the water, hiding deep in the stream bottom, refusing to emerge despite Wukong's continued insults, pretending to be deaf.

Having no alternative, Wukong returned to Tang Monk and said, "Master, I cursed that monster out, and he fought with me for a while, but then fled back into the water when he couldn't match me. Now he's hiding in there and won't come out." Tang Monk asked, "Are you sure he ate our horse?" Wukong said, "Listen to yourself! If he hadn't eaten it, would he have come out to fight me?" Tang Monk said, "The other day when you fought the tiger, didn't you say you had skills to subdue dragons and tigers? Why can't you subdue him today?"

The monkey couldn't stand being pressed, and when Tang Monk provoked him with these words, he flared up with divine power: "Don't say more! Don't say more! Let me show him who's superior!"

The Monkey King strode to the stream bank and used his heaven-shaking power to stir up the crystal-clear waters of Eagle-Grief Stream until they churned like the flooding Yellow River's nine bends. The evil dragon, sitting peacefully in the deep stream, thought to himself: "This truly is double misfortune, not single. I had just escaped death by heaven's decree, and living here peacefully for less than a year, I've now encountered this wretch who comes to harm me!" The more he thought, the angrier he became. Unable to swallow his pride, he gritted his teeth and leaped out, cursing, "Where are you from, you wretch, to dare bully me like this!" Wukong said, "Never mind where I'm from, just return the horse and I'll spare your life!" The dragon said, "I've swallowed your horse into my belly - how can I return it? What will you do if I don't?"

Wukong said, "If you don't return the horse, taste my rod! I'll beat you to death to pay for my horse's life!" They fought again at the mountain cliff. After a few rounds, the small dragon truly couldn't withstand it. He transformed into a water snake and slipped into the grass.

The Monkey King, holding his rod, rushed forward to search the grass for the snake, but found no trace. Furious enough to make his three souls shake and smoke pour from his seven openings, he recited the Om spell and summoned the local Earth God and Mountain Spirit. They both came kneeling, saying, "Earth God and Mountain Spirit present." Wukong said, "Stretch out your shanks for five strokes each as greeting, to help calm my anger!" The two gods kowtowed and pleaded, "Great Sage, please be merciful and let us speak." Wukong said, "What do you have to say?"

The two gods said, "Great Sage has been confined for so long, we didn't know when you'd be released, so we failed to welcome you. Please forgive us." Wukong said, "Since you put it that way, I won't beat you. Let me ask you: what kind of monster dragon is in Eagle-Grief Stream? How dare he snatch and eat my master's white horse?"

The two gods replied, "Great Sage, you never had a master before - weren't you that immortal who didn't submit to Heaven or Earth? How did you get a master with a horse?" Wukong said, "You don't know. Just for that trick of defying authority, I suffered five hundred years of hardship. Now Guanyin Bodhisattva has encouraged me to do good, having a true monk from the Tang court rescue me, making me his disciple to go to the West to fetch scriptures. Passing here, we lost my master's white horse."

The two gods said, "So that's how it is. This stream has never had evil creatures. It's just deep and wide, with crystal-clear water to the bottom. Crows and magpies don't dare fly over it because when they see their reflection in the clear water, they mistake it for other birds and often plunge to their deaths. That's why it's called Eagle-Grief Stream. Years ago, Guanyin Bodhisattva, while searching for someone to fetch the scriptures, saved a jade dragon and sent him here, telling him to wait for the scripture seeker and not to cause trouble. He only catches birds and deer to eat when hungry. We don't know why he was so foolish today to offend the Great Sage."

Wukong said, "The first time, he still fought with me for several rounds. Later when I cursed him, he wouldn't come out, so I used my stream-churning technique. He came up wanting to fight again. Not knowing my rod's weight, he couldn't block it and turned into a water snake, hiding in the grass. I came to search but found no trace."

The Earth God said, "Great Sage doesn't know that this stream has thousands of connected holes, making its waves deep and far-reaching. There must be a hole here where he escaped. Don't waste your anger searching here. To catch this creature, just invite Guanyin, and he'll naturally submit."

Hearing this, Wukong brought the Mountain Spirit and Earth God to meet Tang Monk and explained everything. Tang Monk said, "If we must invite the Bodhisattva, how long will that take? How can this poor monk endure hunger and cold?"

Before he finished speaking, they heard the Golden-Headed Deity say from the dark void, "Great Sage, you needn't go yourself. I'll go invite the Bodhisattva." Wukong was overjoyed and said, "Much obliged! Hurry, hurry!" The deity immediately soared on his cloud toward the Southern Sea. Wukong ordered the Mountain Spirit and Earth God to protect his master, sent the Duty God to find food offerings, and went back to patrol the stream bank.

Meanwhile, the Golden-Headed Deity arrived quickly at the Southern Sea. Landing his auspicious cloud, he went straight to Mount Potaraka in the Purple Bamboo Grove. He asked the Golden-Armored Deities and Moksha to relay his message and was granted audience with the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva asked, "Why have you come?" The deity replied, "Tang Monk has lost his horse at Snake-Coil Mountain's Eagle-Grief Stream, leaving Sun Great Sage in a difficult position. When questioning the local Earth God, we learned it was the evil dragon you placed there who swallowed it. The Great Sage sent me to report this to you and ask you to subdue this evil dragon and return the horse."

Hearing this, the Bodhisattva said, "This creature is the son of Ao Run of the Western Sea. For burning the palace's bright pearls, his father reported his disobedience. He was sentenced to death in Heaven, but I personally appealed to the Jade Emperor to spare him and send him down to be a mount for Tang Monk. How dare he instead eat Tang Monk's horse? Very well, I'll go." The Bodhisattva descended from her lotus throne, left her divine cave with the deity, and rode her auspicious cloud across the Southern Sea. A poem proves it:

The Buddha speaks the sweet dew dharma words,  
Bodhisattva spreads goodness through the great wall.  
Mahayana's wondrous words connect Heaven and Earth,  
Prajna's true speech saves demon spirits.  
Making the Golden Cicada shed its shell again,  
Causing Xuanzang to cultivate once more.  
Just because Eagle-Grief Stream blocks the way,  
The dragon son returns to truth in horse form.

The Bodhisattva and the deity soon reached Snake-Coil Mountain. Staying on their auspicious clouds in mid-air, they looked down and saw Wukong cursing by the stream. The Bodhisattva had the deity call him up. The deity descended and, without going through Tang Monk, went straight to the stream bank and told Wukong, "The Bodhisattva has arrived." Hearing this, Wukong jumped into the air and shouted at her, "You teacher of seven Buddhas, compassionate guide! How could you devise such ways to harm me!"

The Bodhisattva said, "You audacious ape, you ignorant creature! I went to great lengths to find a scripture seeker and carefully instructed him to save your life. Instead of thanking me for saving your life, you come shouting at me?" Wukong said, "You've really done me wrong! After freeing me, you could have let me play freely. But when you met me at sea, you hurt me with a few words, making me serve Tang Monk with all my heart. That would have been fine, but then you gave him a flower cap to trick me into wearing it on my head and suffer! You made this band grow into my head, and taught him some tightening spell that he keeps reciting, making my head hurt again and again. Isn't this you harming me?"

The Bodhisattva smiled and said, "You monkey! If you don't follow instructions and accept your destiny, if I didn't restrain you like this, you would again defy Heaven and cause trouble. Who would control you? You need this demon-subduing band before you'll enter my yoga path!" Wukong said, "Fine, let's say that's my demon-subduing band. But why did you send that guilty dragon here to become a monster and eat my master's horse? This is encouraging evil-doing - most unvirtuous!"

The Bodhisattva said, "That dragon was personally requested by me from the Jade Emperor to wait here specifically to be a mount for the scripture seeker. Think about it - how could an ordinary mortal horse from the East cross these thousands of waters and mountains? How could it reach the Spirit Mountain of Buddha? Only this dragon horse could make the journey." Wukong said, "But he's so afraid of me that he hides and won't come out - what can we do?"

The Bodhisattva told the deity, "Go to the stream bank and call out, 'Dragon Prince Yu Long, third son of Dragon King Ao Run, come out - South Sea Bodhisattva is here.' He will emerge." The deity went to the stream bank and called twice. The little dragon leaped up through the waves, transformed into human form, rode a cloud to the sky, and bowed to the Bodhisattva, saying, "Thanks to your mercy in saving my life, I've been waiting here long but haven't heard any news of the scripture seeker."

The Bodhisattva pointed at Wukong and said, "Isn't this the scripture seeker's senior disciple?" The little dragon looked and said, "Bodhisattva, this is my enemy. Yesterday, being hungry, I did eat his horse. He relied on his strength to fight me until I retreated weakened, then cursed me so I dared not come out. He never mentioned anything about seeking scriptures." Wukong said, "You never asked my name or origin, how could I tell you?" The little dragon said, "Didn't you just shout, 'Never mind where I'm from, just return my horse!'? When did you mention anything about Tang?"

The Bodhisattva said, "That monkey always relies on his own strength and never praises others. From now on, when you meet others who submit, if they ask, mention 'seeking scriptures' first, and you won't need to waste effort - they'll naturally bow." Wukong happily accepted the teaching. The Bodhisattva stepped forward, removed the bright pearl from under the little dragon's chin, sprinkled him with sweet dew from her willow branch, blew a divine breath, and called "Transform!" The dragon immediately changed into his original horse form. She further instructed, "You must work diligently to repay your karma. After success, you'll transcend ordinary dragons and gain a golden body of true achievement." The little dragon accepted with his bit between his teeth.

The Bodhisattva told Wukong to take him to see Tang Monk, saying "I'm returning to the sea." But Wukong grabbed her and wouldn't let go, saying, "I won't go! I won't go! The Western road is so treacherous, protecting this mortal monk - when will we ever arrive? With so many trials and tribulations, old Sun's life might not last - how can I achieve any merit?" The Bodhisattva said, "You once willingly cultivated enlightenment before becoming human. Now that you've escaped heavenly disaster, how can you become lazy? In my school, we achieve truth through tranquility. You must maintain sincere faith for true achievement. If you reach places that harm body and spirit, I permit you to call Heaven and Earth for help. If you truly face situations you cannot escape, I will come personally to save you. Come here, I'll give you another ability."

The Bodhisattva plucked three willow leaves, placed them behind Wukong's head, called "Transform!" and they became three life-saving hairs. She told him, "When you face desperate situations, these can transform as needed to save you from urgent danger." Hearing these kind words, Wukong finally thanked the great merciful Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva, surrounded by fragrant winds and colorful mists, returned to Potaraka.

Only then did Wukong descend from the clouds, grab the dragon horse's mane, and go to Tang Monk, saying, "Master, we have the horse." Tang Monk was overjoyed and said, "Disciple, why does this horse look even fatter than before? Where did you find it?" Wukong said, "Master, you're still dreaming! Just now the Golden-Headed Deity invited the Bodhisattva here, who transformed that stream dragon into our white horse. The coloring is identical, just without saddle and bridle, so I'm leading it here."

Tang Monk was greatly surprised and said, "Where is the Bodhisattva? Let me go thank her." Wukong said, "The Bodhisattva has already returned to the Southern Sea and won't wait." Tang Monk immediately gathered some dirt as incense, faced south, and bowed in worship. After finishing his bows, he rose to continue westward with Wukong. Wukong dismissed the Mountain Spirit and Earth God, instructed the deity and duty gods, and asked his master to mount. Tang Monk said, "How can I ride a horse without saddle and bridle? Let's find a boat to cross the stream first, then figure something out." Wukong said, "Master, you really don't understand! Where would we find a boat in this remote mountain wilderness? This horse has lived here long and must know the water's conditions. Just ride him across like a boat."

Tang Monk had no choice but to agree and mounted the bare horse. Wukong carried the luggage to the stream bank. Just then, they saw an old fisherman upstream, punting a raft made of dead wood downstream. Wukong saw him and called out, "Old fisherman, come here! We're scripture seekers from the East, and my master can't cross. Come ferry him over." Hearing this, the fisherman quickly punted over. Wukong helped his master dismount and supported him onto the raft. They brought up the horse and secured the luggage.

The old fisherman pushed off the raft, and like wind and arrow, they quickly crossed Eagle-Grief Stream to the western bank. Tang Monk told Wukong to open their bundle and take out some Tang coins to pay the old fisherman. The fisherman pushed his raft away saying, "No money needed, no money needed!" and disappeared into the misty distance of midstream.

Tang Monk felt very apologetic and kept bowing in thanks. Wukong said, "Master, stop worrying about it. Don't you recognize him? He's the water god of this stream. He didn't come to welcome old Sun, and I was going to beat him. Getting away without a beating is enough for him - how dare he take money!" The master half-believed him. He had no choice but to mount the bare horse and follow Wukong along the main road westward. This truly is:

Great true suchness reaches the other shore,  
Sincere mind completes nature, ascending Spirit Mountain.

As master and disciple traveled on, they didn't notice the red sun setting in the west and the sky growing dark. They saw:

Scattered clouds in disorder,  
Mountain moon dim and hazy.  
Frost colors fill the sky bringing cold,  
Wind sounds pierce the body all around.  
Lone birds fly to wide dark shores,  
Setting sun shows distant mountains low.  
Sparse woods echo with thousand trees,  
Empty peaks hear single apes cry.  
Long road shows no traveler's tracks,  
Ten thousand boats return in night time.

Tang Monk, looking ahead from horseback, suddenly saw a group of buildings by the road. Tang Monk said, "Wukong, there's a house ahead where we can spend the night and continue tomorrow." Wukong looked up and said, "Master, it's not a house." Tang Monk asked, "Why not?" Wukong said, "Houses don't have flying fish and stable beasts on their ridges - this must be a temple or monastery."

As master and disciple talked, they arrived at the gate. Tang Monk dismounted and saw three characters above the door reading "Earth God Temple." They entered, and inside was an old man wearing prayer beads who came forward with clasped hands saying, "Master, please sit." Tang Monk hurriedly returned the greeting, went to the hall to pay respects to the sacred images, and the old man immediately called for a boy to bring tea. After tea, Tang Monk asked the old man, "Why is this called an Earth God Temple?"

The old man replied, "This is the border of the Western Ha Pi Country. Behind this temple are several households who jointly built this temple out of devotion. 'Li' means the local area; 'She' means the local deity. Every spring plowing, summer weeding, autumn harvesting, and winter storing, they bring offerings of meat and fruit to worship here, praying for good weather in all four seasons, abundant harvests of the five grains, and thriving livestock." Tang Monk nodded in approval, saying, "Indeed, three miles from home brings different customs. People in my homeland don't have such good practices."

The old man then asked, "Master, where is your honored homeland?" Tang Monk replied, "This humble monk is from the Great Tang in the East, sent by imperial decree to worship Buddha and seek scriptures in the West. Coming to your sacred temple as night falls, I seek lodging for one night and will continue at dawn." The old man was delighted and said several words of apology for the late welcome, then called the boy to prepare food. Tang Monk ate and gave thanks. Wukong, being sharp-eyed, saw a clothesline under the eaves, went over and pulled it down to tie up the horse.

The old man laughed and said, "Where did you steal this horse from?" Wukong angrily replied, "You old fellow, you don't know what's proper! We are holy monks seeking scriptures - how could we steal horses?" The old man laughed, "If it's not stolen, why doesn't it have saddle or bridle, and why did you tear down my clothes-drying rope?" Tang Monk apologetically said, "This naughty one is just impetuous. If you want to tie up the horse, you should properly ask the elder for a rope. How could you just break his clothesline? Elder, please don't be offended. Let me tell you honestly about this horse: Yesterday coming from the east, at Eagle-Grief Stream, I had a white horse complete with saddle and bridle. Unexpectedly, there was an evil dragon in that stream who had become a monster and swallowed my horse whole, including the tack. Fortunately, my disciple has some abilities, and thanks to Guanyin Bodhisattva coming to the stream to capture that dragon, she made him transform into my original white horse, with identical coloring, to carry me to worship Buddha in the West. Having just crossed the stream today, we haven't yet acquired saddle and bridle."

The old man said, "Master, forgive me. I was just joking, but your honorable disciple took it seriously. When I was young, I had some village money and could ride fine horses too. But after years of misfortune, fires, and deaths, I ended up here as a temple keeper, serving the incense and fire, fortunately able to get by through donations from the patrons of the rear village. I still have a set of horse tack that I've treasured - even in such poverty, I couldn't bear to sell it. Hearing master's story that even the Bodhisattva provides protection and a dragon transforms to carry you, how can I, this old man, not offer some small help? Tomorrow I'll bring out that horse tack and give it to master for your journey - please accept it with a smile."

Hearing this, Tang Monk expressed endless gratitude. Soon the boy brought out evening meal. After eating, they lit lamps, prepared beds, and all went to rest.

The next morning, Wukong got up and said, "Master, that old temple keeper promised us horse tack last night - we should ask him for it and not let him off." Before he finished speaking, the old man indeed came carrying a complete set of saddle, blankets, bridle, and all other horse equipment, laying them in the corridor saying, "Master, I offer this horse tack." Tang Monk saw it and gladly accepted, telling Wukong to take it and see if it fits the horse. Wukong went forward and examined each piece - they were indeed fine items. A poem proves it:

Carved saddle gleams with silver stars,  
Precious stirrups shine with golden threads.  
Layer upon layer of wool padding stacked,  
Three strands of purple silk make reins.  
Bridle's leather shows clustered flowers bright,  
Cloud-fans gold-traced with dancing beasts.  
Bit forged from well-tempered iron,  
Two hanging tassels with water-rippling hair.

Wukong was secretly delighted. He put the tack on the horse's back - it fit as if made to measure. Tang Monk bowed repeatedly to thank the old man, who hurriedly helped him up saying, "I'm humbled! I'm humbled! Why such ceremony?" The old man didn't detain them further and invited Tang Monk to mount. As the master went out the door and got on the horse, the old man took out a whip from his sleeve - it had a fragrant rattan handle with tiger-sinew braided tip - and offered it from the roadside saying, "Holy monk, I have this riding crop to give you as well." Tang Monk accepted it from horseback saying, "Many thanks for your generosity! Many thanks!"

Just as they were exchanging courtesies, the old man suddenly vanished. When they looked back at the Earth God Temple, it was just an empty plot of ground. They only heard someone speaking in mid-air: "Holy monk, pardon my poor hospitality. I am the Mountain Spirit and Earth God of Mount Potalaka, sent by the Bodhisattva to deliver the horse tack to you. You must journey west diligently and not be lazy for a moment." Tang Monk hurriedly rolled from his saddle and bowed to the sky saying, "Disciple, with mortal eyes and body, did not recognize your divine presence and countenance. Please convey my deep gratitude to the Bodhisattva for her profound grace." He kept kowtowing to the sky countless times.

By the roadside, Sun Wukong was doubled over with laughter, the Great Sage beside himself with joy. He pulled Tang Monk up saying, "Master, you can stop bowing - he's gone far away and can't hear your prayers or see your kowtows anymore. Why keep bowing?" The Master said, "Disciple, I'm making such effort to bow, yet you won't even make one bow and just stand aside laughing - what kind of behavior is this?"

Wukong said, "You don't understand. Someone sneaking around like that should have gotten a beating, but I spared him only out of respect for the Bodhisattva - how dare he receive my bow? Since childhood, I've been a hero and never learned to bow to people. Even meeting the Jade Emperor or Laozi, I just give a casual greeting."

Tang Monk said, "Unfilial one! Don't speak such empty words! Quickly get up, don't delay our journey." Only then did the master rise and prepare to continue west.

From here they traveled peacefully for two months, meeting various foreigners and nomads, wolves and tigers. Time flew swiftly, and early spring arrived. They saw mountain forests in brocade colors, grass and trees sprouting green buds; plum blossoms had fallen, and willow buds were just opening. As master and disciple enjoyed the spring scenery, they saw the sun setting in the west. Tang Monk reined in his horse to look ahead and saw shadowy towers and pavilions in a valley. Tang Monk asked, "Wukong, what place is that ahead?" Wukong looked up and said, "It's not a mansion but must be a temple or monastery. Let's hurry there and seek lodging." Tang Monk happily agreed and urged his dragon horse forward.

We'll see what kind of place it is in the next chapter.

**Chapter 27: The Corpse Fiend Three Times Tricks Tang Sanzang**  
The Holy Monk in Anger Expels Monkey King

The story tells that Tang Sanzang and his disciples set out the next morning. Master Zhenyuan, having become brothers with Wukong, felt such a deep connection that he was reluctant to let them leave. He kept entertaining them for five or six more days. The Master, having taken the immortality pill, felt completely renewed in body and spirit. However, his determination to obtain the scriptures was strong, and he wouldn't delay any longer, so they finally departed.

Master and disciples bid farewell and set out. Soon they saw a tall mountain ahead. Tang Sanzang said, "Disciple, there's a steep mountain ahead. I fear the horse cannot proceed. We must all be very careful." Wukong said, "Master, don't worry, we'll handle it." The good Monkey King went ahead of the horse, carrying his staff horizontally, clearing the mountain path. Climbing the high cliff, they saw:

Peaks piled upon peaks,  
Valleys winding round and round.  
Tigers and wolves prowling in packs,  
Deer and muntjacs moving in herds.  
Countless wild boars clustering thick,  
Mountain foxes and rabbits gathering in groups.  
Thousand-foot pythons,  
Ten-thousand-yard serpents.  
Pythons spewing gloomy mist,  
Serpents breathing strange winds.  
Thorns and brambles spread along the path,  
Pine and cedar trees standing beautiful on the ridge.  
Vines fill the eye,  
Fragrant grass reaches to heaven.  
Shadows fall north of the grey sea,  
Clouds part south of the Big Dipper.  
For ages containing primordial energy,  
Thousand peaks stand cold in sunlight.

The Elder was frightened on his horse, while the Great Sage Sun displayed his abilities, wielding his iron staff and letting out a roar that sent wolves scurrying and tigers fleeing. As the group entered deeper into the mountain's most rugged area, Tang Sanzang said, "Wukong, I'm hungry today. Could you go somewhere to beg for some food?" Wukong smiled and said, "Master, you're not being sensible. Here in the middle of the mountain, with no villages ahead or shops behind, even with money we couldn't buy anything. Where could I find food?"

Tang Sanzang became displeased and scolded, "You monkey! Remember when you were trapped under Two Worlds Mountain by the Buddha, sealed in that stone box - you could speak but couldn't move. I saved your life, gave you the precepts, made you my disciple. How can you be so lazy and unwilling to make an effort!" Wukong replied, "I've been quite diligent, when have I been lazy?" Tang Sanzang said, "If you're diligent, why won't you go find some food? How can I travel when I'm hungry? Moreover, in this mountain miasma, how will we ever reach Thunder Monastery?"

Wukong said, "Master, don't be angry, say less. I know your noble nature is proud, and if I displease you too much, you'll recite that spell. Just dismount and sit quietly while I look for somewhere with people to beg for food." Wukong leaped up to the clouds, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked around. Alas, the western road was quite desolate, with no villages or settlements, truly a place of many trees but few human traces. After looking for some time, he saw a tall mountain to the south with some red spots on its sunny side. Wukong descended and said, "Master, I've found something to eat!"

When the Elder asked what it was, Wukong replied, "There are no houses here to beg food from, but on that southern mountain there are some red spots that must be fully ripe peaches. I'll go pick some to satisfy your hunger." Tang Sanzang happily said, "For monks to have peaches would be excellent fortune. Go quickly!" Wukong took his bowl and soared up on auspicious clouds, his somersaults flashing through the cold air, heading toward the southern mountain to pick peaches.

Meanwhile, as the saying goes: tall mountains must have spirits, steep ridges breed monsters. Indeed, there was a demon on this mountain, and Wukong's departure had alerted it. Riding dark winds in the clouds, it saw the Elder sitting below and rejoiced: "What luck! For years people have talked about the Tang Monk from the East seeking scriptures - he's the reincarnation of Golden Cicada, one who has cultivated through ten lives. Anyone who eats a piece of his flesh will gain immortality. He's really here today!"

The demon was about to seize him but saw two great generals protecting him on either side and didn't dare approach. Who were these two generals? They were Zhu Bajie and Sha Monk. Though Bajie and Sha Monk weren't particularly skilled, Bajie was once Marshal Tianpeng and Sha Monk was once the Curtain-Raising General, and their divine aura had not yet dissipated, so the demon dared not approach. The demon said, "Let me play a trick on him and see what happens."

The good demon stopped its dark wind and, in a mountain hollow, transformed into a beautiful young woman with moon-like face and flower-like countenance. Her eyebrows were clear, her eyes bright, teeth white, and lips red. In her left hand she carried a blue sand pot, in her right hand a green porcelain bottle, and she walked from west to east, heading straight for Tang Sanzang. The holy monk was resting his horse by the mountain rocks when he suddenly saw this woman approaching:

Her emerald sleeves swayed, revealing jade-like wrists,  
Her Xiang silk skirt dragged, showing golden lotuses.  
Sweat glistened on her powdered face like flower dew,  
Dust touched her moth-like brows like willow smoke.  
Looking carefully as she drew near,  
She approached step by step.

Tang Sanzang called out, "Bajie, Sha Monk, Wukong just said this area was desolate and uninhabited, but look - isn't someone coming?" Bajie said, "Master, you sit with Sha Monk while I go look." The fool put down his rake, straightened his robe, and swaggered forward trying to look refined, going straight to meet her. Indeed, from far you can't be sure, but up close you see clearly. The woman was truly beautiful:

Ice-white skin held jade bones within,  
Her collar revealed a snow-white chest.  
Willow eyebrows held concentrated black,  
Almond eyes flashed silver light.  
Moon-like face most captivating,  
Heaven-granted nature most pure.  
Body like a swallow hiding in willows,  
Voice like an oriole singing in woods.  
Half-opened crabapple catching dawn's light,  
Just-bloomed peony playing in spring sun.

When Bajie saw how beautiful she was, lustful thoughts stirred in the fool's heart. Unable to contain himself, he blurted out, "Lady Bodhisattva, where are you going? What are you carrying?" Though she was clearly a demon, he couldn't recognize her. The woman responded, "Venerable sir, in this blue pot is fragrant rice, and in the green bottle is fried wheat gluten. I've come here for no other reason than to fulfill a vow to feed monks."

Hearing this, Bajie was overjoyed. He quickly turned and ran back like a mad pig to report to Tang Sanzang: "Master! Heaven rewards good people! When Master was hungry and sent Brother to beg for food, that monkey went who knows where to play with peaches. Peaches can be too sour, and they can upset your stomach. Look, isn't that someone coming to feed monks?"

Tang Sanzang didn't believe him, saying, "You fool, stop talking nonsense! We haven't met a single good person on this journey - how could someone offering food to monks suddenly appear?" Bajie said, "Master, here she comes!"

When Tang Sanzang saw her, he quickly jumped up, put his palms together and said, "Lady Bodhisattva, where do you live? Whose family are you from? What vow brings you here to feed monks?" Though she was clearly a demon, the Elder didn't recognize her either. The demon, hearing Tang Sanzang ask about her background, immediately fabricated a story, using flowery words to deceive him: "Master, this mountain is called White Tiger Ridge where snakes retreat and beasts fear to tread. My home is just below to the west. My parents are still alive and devout Buddhists who widely feed monks from near and far. Having no son, they prayed for blessings and good fortune, and gave birth to me. Wanting to arrange a good marriage, but fearing they would have no support in their old age, they found me a husband to care for them in their final years."

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang said, "Lady Bodhisattva, your words are mistaken. The sacred texts say: 'With parents alive, one does not travel far, and if one must travel, one must have a destination.' Since your parents are alive and you have a husband, if you had a vow to fulfill, your husband should do it. How can you be walking alone in the mountains without even a servant? This is not following proper wifely conduct."

The woman smiled and quickly replied with coy words: "Master, my husband is in the northern hollow with some helpers plowing the fields. This is the lunch I cooked for them. Because it's the height of summer, we have no servants to send, and my parents are elderly, so I'm delivering it myself. Upon meeting you three travelers, and thinking of my parents' devotion to good works, I wish to offer this food to you monks. If you don't reject it as unworthy, I'd like to present this humble offering."

Tang Sanzang said, "Excellent! Excellent! I have a disciple who went to pick fruit and will return soon. I dare not eat alone. If my monk's eating your food makes your husband angry when he finds out, wouldn't that bring blame upon this poor monk?" The woman, seeing Tang Sanzang's refusal, put on an even more spring-like expression and said, "Master, my parents' feeding of monks is a small matter. My husband is an even more virtuous person who loves nothing more than building bridges and repairing roads, caring for the elderly and helping the poor. If he hears I gave this food to you master, our marital harmony will only grow stronger."

Tang Sanzang still refused to eat, which greatly annoyed Bajie at his side. The fool pushed out his snout and grumbled, "There are countless monks in the world, but I've never seen one as stubborn as my old master! He won't eat these three portions of ready food, waiting instead for that monkey to return to make it four portions!"

Without waiting for discussion, he thrust his snout at the pot, about to eat, when suddenly Wukong returned from the southern mountain peak. He had picked several peaches and was carrying them in his bowl when, with one somersault, he returned. Opening his fiery eyes and golden pupils to look, he recognized the woman as a demon. He put down his bowl, pulled out his iron staff, and was about to strike. This frightened the Elder, who grabbed him saying, "Wukong! Who are you coming to hit?"

Wukong said, "Master, don't mistake that woman before you for a good person. She's a demon trying to trick you!" Tang Sanzang said, "You reckless monkey! You used to have some discernment, but now you speak nonsense! This lady bodhisattva has the kind intention of offering us food - how can you say she's a demon?"

Wukong laughed, "Master, you don't understand! When I was a demon in the Water Curtain Cave, if I wanted to eat human flesh, I'd do just this: transform into gold and silver, or mansions, or drunk people, or beautiful women. When some foolish person fell for it, I'd lure them into my cave and eat them at my leisure, whether steamed or boiled. If I couldn't finish them, I'd even dry the leftovers for rainy days! Master, if I had come late, you would have fallen into her trap and met a cruel end!"

But Tang Sanzang wouldn't believe him, insisting she was a good person. Wukong said, "Master, I understand you now. Seeing her beauty, you must have had lustful thoughts. If that's what you want, let me have Bajie cut some trees and Sha Monk gather some grass. I'll be the carpenter and build a little hut right here. You can marry her and be done with it! Why bother continuing west for scriptures?"

The Elder, being a gentle person, couldn't stand such words and blushed red to his ears. While Tang Sanzang was still embarrassed, Wukong's temper flared up and he raised his staff to strike the demon in the face. The demon had some skill and used a soul-separating technique. Seeing Wukong's staff coming, it gathered its spirit and fled in advance, leaving a false corpse on the ground.

This terrified the Elder, who trembled and chanted, "What a disrespectful monkey! Despite repeated warnings, you commit murder without cause! First killing one person, then another - what can be said of this?"

Wukong said, "Master, don't blame me. Let's look at what's in that pot." Sha Monk helped the Elder approach, and they saw that instead of fragrant rice, the pot was full of writhing maggots with tails, and instead of wheat gluten, there were jumping frogs and toads. The Elder now believed about three-tenths, but Bajie, still disgruntled, whispered eight-tenths of doubt in his ear: "Master, this woman was just a local farmer's wife delivering lunch to the fields. How can he claim she's a demon? Brother's staff is heavy, and when he rushed to test it on her, he accidentally killed her. Fearing you'd recite the tight-band spell, he deliberately used magic to transform these things to deceive your eyes and avoid the spell."

These words brought bad luck to Tang Sanzang. He believed the fool's instigation and, making a mudra with his hand, began reciting the spell. Wukong immediately cried out, "My head hurts! My head hurts! Stop reciting! Stop! If you have something to say, just say it!" Tang Sanzang said, "What is there to say! Monks should always be merciful, never departing from kindness. We sweep the ground carefully to avoid harming insects' lives, and cover lamps with gauze to protect moths. How can you constantly commit violence, killing innocent people? What use would getting the scriptures be? You should go back!"

Wukong said, "Master, where would you have me go back to?" Tang Sanzang said, "I don't want you as my disciple anymore." Wukong said, "If you don't want me as your disciple, I'm afraid you won't make it to the Western Heaven." Tang Sanzang said, "My fate is in Heaven's hands. If I'm destined to be steamed or boiled by some demon, so be it. You couldn't save me from my predestined lifespan anyway! Go back quickly!"

Wukong said, "Master, I'll go back, but I haven't yet repaid your kindness." Tang Sanzang asked, "What kindness do I have towards you?" The Great Sage, hearing this, quickly knelt and kowtowed, saying, "Because I caused havoc in Heaven, I suffered the punishment of injury, trapped under Two Worlds Mountain by Buddha. Thanks to Guanyin Bodhisattva having me take the precepts, and Master rescuing me, if I don't accompany you to the Western Heaven, I would appear ungrateful and not a gentleman, deserving curses for thousands of years."

Now Tang Sanzang was originally a merciful holy monk. Seeing Wukong's plea, he had a change of heart: "Since you put it that way, I'll spare you this once, but don't be disrespectful again. If you continue doing evil, I'll recite this spell twenty times!" Wukong said, "You can recite it thirty times if you want, just as long as I don't have to hit anyone anymore." Only then did he help Tang Sanzang mount and offered him the peaches he had picked. Tang Sanzang ate a few on horseback to satisfy his hunger.

Meanwhile, that demon had escaped into the sky. Actually, Wukong's strike hadn't killed the demon; it had merely projected its spirit away. Up in the clouds, gnashing its teeth, it secretly cursed Wukong: "For years I've heard about his abilities, and today proves the stories weren't false. That Tang Monk didn't recognize me and was about to eat. If he had just lowered his head to smell it, I would have grabbed him and he would have been mine! Who knew that monkey would return and ruin my plan, nearly hitting me with his staff. If I let this monk go, it would truly be wasted effort. I'll go down and play another trick on him."

The good demon descended on dark clouds and, at the foot of the mountain, transformed again - this time into an elderly woman of eighty years, leaning on a curved bamboo staff, walking and crying with each step. When Bajie saw this, he was greatly alarmed and said, "Master! We're in trouble! That old mother is coming to look for someone!" Tang Sanzang asked, "Looking for whom?" Bajie said, "The one Brother killed must have been her daughter. This must be her mother coming to look. Master, you'll be charged with murder, I'll be sentenced to exile as an accomplice, Sha Monk will be ordered to stand guard, and that Monkey will use his magic to escape - won't the three of us be left to take the blame?"

Hearing this, Wukong said, "You fool, stop talking nonsense! Aren't you frightening Master? Let me go look." The good Monkey King strode forward to observe, and the demon mistook him for an ordinary person and replied, "Venerable monk, I've lived in this area all my life, always devoted to good deeds and feeding monks, reading sutras and worshiping Buddha. Having no son, I only had one daughter and found her a son-in-law. This morning she was delivering lunch to the fields, and I fear she met with a tiger. My wife came looking first but hasn't returned, and I don't know what happened. I've come specially to look. If they've indeed met with harm, I can at least collect their remains for burial."

Wukong laughed, "I'm the ancestor of tiger-frighteners! How dare you hide a ghost in your sleeve to fool me? You may deceive others, but you can't deceive me! I know you're a demon!" The demon was so startled it couldn't speak. Wukong pulled out his staff and thought to himself, "If I don't hit it, it would seem I'm just making a fuss. If I do hit it, I'm afraid Master will recite that spell. But if I don't kill it, it might seize Master when we're not paying attention - wouldn't that mean more trouble to rescue him? I'd better hit it! Even if Master recites the spell, as they say, 'Even a tiger won't eat its cubs.' With my clever tongue, I should be able to talk my way out of it."

The Great Sage recited a spell summoning the local Earth God and Mountain Spirit: "This demon has come to trick my master three times, and now I must kill it. You serve as witnesses in mid-air, don't let it escape." The deities, hearing the command, dared not disobey and watched from the clouds. When the Great Sage raised his staff, he struck the demon, instantly extinguishing its spirit light.

Tang Sanzang on his horse was again trembling with fear, unable to speak. Bajie laughed beside him, "Good Monkey! He's gone mad! Only half a day's journey and he's killed three people!" Just as Tang Sanzang was about to recite the spell, Wukong rushed to the horse's side, crying, "Master, don't recite! Don't recite! Come look at its true form." It was a pile of white bones. Tang Sanzang was greatly shocked: "Wukong, this person just died - how did they turn into a pile of bones?" Wukong said, "It was a spirit-possessing corpse demon that deceived people here. When I killed it, its true form was revealed. On its spine there are words reading 'White Bone Lady.'"

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang half believed him, but Bajie whispered at his side: "Master, his hand is heavy and his staff deadly. Having killed someone, he fears you'll recite that spell, so he deliberately transformed it to this shape to deceive you!" Tang Sanzang, being gullible, believed him and started reciting again. Wukong, unable to bear the pain, knelt by the roadside crying, "Stop reciting! Stop reciting! If you have something to say, say it quickly!"

Tang Sanzang said, "Monkey head! What is there to say! A monk's good deeds are like spring garden grass - though its growth isn't visible, it increases daily. An evil person is like a grindstone - though its wearing away isn't visible, it decreases daily. Here in this remote area, you've killed three people in succession. Fortunately, there's no one to report it, no witnesses. But if we reach a city or populated area, and you take that murderous staff and start hitting people recklessly, causing great trouble, how would I escape? You go back!"

Wukong said, "Master, you wrong me. This was clearly a demon intent on harming you. I killed it to eliminate the threat to you, but you don't recognize this and instead believe that fool's slanderous words, repeatedly driving me away. As they say, 'Things shouldn't go beyond three times.' If I don't leave, I'd truly be shameless. I'll go, I'll go! Though when I'm gone, you'll have no one capable serving you."

Tang Sanzang angrily said, "This impudent monkey gets more disrespectful! It seems you think you're the only capable one - aren't Wuneng and Wujing also capable?" When the Great Sage heard him say these two were capable, he couldn't hold back his grief and said to Tang Sanzang: "How bitter! When you left Chang'an, Liu Boqin saw you off. At Two Worlds Mountain, you rescued me, and I became your disciple. I've gone through ancient caves and deep forests, subduing demons and capturing monsters, recruiting Bajie and gaining Sha Monk, enduring countless hardships. Today you're being foolishly confused, just telling me to go back - this is truly 'when birds are gone the bow is stored away, when rabbits die the hunting dog is cooked'! Well, well, well! The only problem is that tight-band spell."

Tang Sanzang said, "I won't recite it anymore." Wukong said, "That's hard to say. If you encounter deadly demons and dire difficulties that Bajie and Sha Monk can't save you from, you'll think of me and won't be able to resist reciting it. Even if I'm ten thousand miles away, my head will still hurt. If I were to come see you again then, it would be better not to have such thoughts."

Seeing his endless words, Tang Sanzang grew even more angry. He dismounted and called Sha Monk to get paper and brush from the luggage. He took water from the stream and ground ink on a stone, then wrote a letter of dismissal and handed it to Wukong: "Monkey head! Take this as proof - you are no longer my disciple! If we meet again, may I fall into the Avici Hell!"

Wukong quickly took the dismissal letter and said, "Master, no need to swear an oath. I'll go." He folded the letter and kept it in his sleeve, then gently said to Tang Sanzang: "Master, I've followed you all this way, and received the Bodhisattva's guidance. Today we part halfway, without achieving our goal. Please sit and accept one bow from me, so I can leave with peace of mind." Tang Sanzang turned away and wouldn't look at him, muttering, "I am a proper monk, I won't accept a bow from an evil person!"

Seeing he wouldn't accept the bow, the Great Sage used an outside body technique. He plucked three hairs from the back of his head, blew a breath of immortal air on them and called "Transform!" They turned into three Wukongs who, with his real self, made four, surrounding the Master to bow. The Elder couldn't dodge left or right and had to accept the bow.

The Great Sage jumped up, shook himself to retrieve his hairs, and then instructed Sha Monk: "Good brother, you are a good person, but be careful of Bajie's words along the way. Be especially vigilant. If demons capture Master at any time, just say that old Sun is his senior disciple. The hairy monsters in the West know of my abilities and won't dare harm my master."

Tang Sanzang said, "I am a proper monk, I won't mention the name of an evil person. You go back!" Seeing that the Elder repeatedly refused to change his mind, the Great Sage had no choice but to leave. Look at him:

With tears he bows to bid the Elder farewell,  
Sadly he instructs Sha Monk to take care.  
His head wets the grass before the slope,  
His feet kick over vines on the ground.  
He can turn in Heaven or Earth like a wheel,  
Cross seas and fly over mountains with supreme skill.  
In an instant his shadow disappears,  
In a flash he returns to his old path.

You see him suppressing his feelings as he left his master, soaring on somersault clouds, heading straight back to Flower Fruit Mountain's Water Curtain Cave. Alone and sorrowful, he suddenly heard the roaring sound of water. The Great Sage looked down from mid-air and saw it was the tide of the Eastern Ocean. Seeing this reminded him of Tang Sanzang, and he couldn't hold back his tears. He stopped his cloud and stood still for a long while before leaving.

We don't know what will happen when he returns; listen to the next chapter to find out.

**Chapter 47: The Holy Monk is Blocked by the Heavenly River at Night**  
The Metal and Wood Gods Show Mercy to Save the Children

The story tells that the king was leaning against his dragon throne, tears flowing like a spring, crying until nightfall without cease. Monkey stepped forward and called out loudly: "Why are you so confused! Look at those Taoist corpses - one is a tiger, one is a deer, and that Yangli is a mountain antelope. If you don't believe me, pull up their bones and look - how could humans have such skeletons? They were mountain beasts who gained spiritual powers and came here together to harm you. Seeing your fortune was still strong, they dared not strike. If they had waited two more years until your fortune declined, they would have taken your life and seized your kingdom. Fortunately, we came early and eliminated these demons to save your life. Why are you still crying? Quickly prepare our travel documents and send us on our way!"

Hearing this, the king finally came to his senses. All the civil and military officials proclaimed: "Indeed, they were a white deer and yellow tiger, and in the oil vat were sheep bones. The holy monk's words cannot be ignored." The king said: "Since this is so, I thank the holy monk. It's late today - Minister, please escort the holy monk to the Zhiyuan Temple. Tomorrow at early court, we'll prepare a grand feast in the east wing, with the Imperial Kitchen arranging pure vegetarian dishes to thank them." They were indeed escorted to the temple to rest.

The next morning at the fifth watch, the king held court, gathering all officials and issuing an edict: "Quickly post notices recruiting monks at all four gates and along all roads." Meanwhile, a grand feast was arranged, and the king left his palace to go to Zhiyuan Temple, inviting Tang Sanzang and his disciples to join the feast in the east wing.

Meanwhile, the monks who had escaped with their lives heard about the notices recruiting monks. They all eagerly entered the city to find the Great Sage Sun and return his hairs in gratitude. After the Master finished the feast, the king changed their travel documents. The queen, concubines, and all civil and military officials saw them off at the palace gates. There they saw the monks kneeling by the road, calling out: "Great Sage Equal to Heaven! We are the monks who escaped at the sandy beach. Hearing that you've eliminated the demons and saved us, and that our king has posted notices recruiting monks, we've come specially to return your hairs and thank you for your divine grace."

Monkey laughed and asked, "How many of you are there?" The monks replied, "Five hundred, not one less." Monkey shook himself and collected his hairs, then addressed the king, officials, monks, and laypeople: "These monks were indeed saved by old Sun. I moved the carriages through double gates and crushed them, and I killed those two demon Taoists. Now that the demons are eliminated, you know that the Buddhist path is true. From now on, don't act recklessly or believe blindly. I hope you'll unite the three teachings - respect Buddhism, respect Taoism, and nurture talent. Then I guarantee your kingdom will be eternally secure." The king followed his words and expressed endless gratitude, then saw Tang Sanzang out of the city.

As they departed, it was all for the sake of earnestly seeking the scriptures of the Three Baskets, striving diligently to cultivate the One Origin. They traveled by day and rested by night, drinking when thirsty and eating when hungry. Without realizing it, spring had passed and summer was ending, and autumn weather had arrived.

One day, as evening fell, Tang Sanzang reined in his horse and said, "Disciples, where shall we rest tonight?" Monkey said, "Master, don't speak like those who live in homes." Tang Sanzang asked, "What's the difference between those who live in homes and those who don't?" Monkey replied, "Those who live in homes are now in warm beds with soft covers, holding their children and pushing away their wives, sleeping comfortably. But we who have left home - how could we expect such comfort? We must travel under the moon and stars, eat the wind and sleep by water, walking where there's a path, stopping only where there isn't."

Bajie said, "Brother, you only know one side but not the other. The road now is very treacherous, and I'm carrying heavy luggage - it's really difficult to walk. We need to find a place to sleep well and restore our energy. Otherwise, won't I collapse from exhaustion?" Monkey said, "Let's walk one more stretch in the moonlight until we reach somewhere with people to stay." The master and disciples had no choice but to follow Monkey forward.

They hadn't gone far when they heard the rushing sound of waves. Bajie said, "That's it! We've reached the end of the road!" Sha Monk said, "There's a body of water blocking our way." Tang Sanzang asked, "How can we cross it?" Bajie said, "Let me test to see how deep it is." Tang Sanzang said, "Wuneng, don't talk nonsense. How can you test the depth of water?" Bajie said, "Find a goose egg-sized stone and throw it in the middle. If water splashes up, it's shallow; if it makes a deep sound going down, it's deep." Monkey said, "Go ahead and try."

The fool found a stone by the road and threw it into the water. They heard a deep "plunk" as fish scattered and it sank to the bottom. He said, "Deep, deep, deep! We can't cross!" Tang Sanzang said, "Though you've tested the depth, you don't know how wide it is." Bajie said, "That I don't know, I don't know." Monkey said, "Let me look." The Great Sage jumped up on his cloud somersault and looked carefully from above. He saw:

Moonlight shimmering on vast waters,  
Reflections floating up to heaven.  
Spirit streams swallowing Mount Hua,  
Long flows cutting through hundred rivers.  
Thousand layers of surging waves,  
Ten thousand tiers of towering billows.  
No fishing fires at the shore,  
Only egrets sleeping on the sand.  
Vast like the sea,  
One look shows no end in sight.

He quickly descended from his cloud and landed by the river, saying, "Master, it's wide, too wide! We can't cross! Even with my Fire Eyes and Golden Pupils that can usually see a thousand miles in daylight and know good from evil, and can still see three to five hundred miles at night, I can't see the other shore from here. How can we determine its width?"

Tang Sanzang was greatly alarmed and could barely speak, his voice choked with emotion: "Disciples, what shall we do?" Sha Monk said, "Master, look - isn't that a person standing by the water?" Monkey said, "It's probably a fisherman casting his net. Let me go ask." Taking his iron rod, he ran over in a few steps to look, but ah! It wasn't a person at all, but a stone tablet. On the tablet were three large seal characters, with two lines of ten smaller characters below. The three large characters read "Heavenly River," and the ten smaller characters read "Eight hundred miles across, rarely crossed since ancient times." Monkey called, "Master, come look!"

When Tang Sanzang saw this, he wept and said, "Disciples, when I left Chang'an, I thought the journey to the West would be easy. Who knew there would be such demon obstacles and such distant mountains and waters! Eight hundred miles - how can we ever cross it?" Bajie said, "Master, listen - where is that sound of drums and cymbals coming from? It must be a house where they're holding a Buddhist ceremony. Let's go beg for some food and ask about a crossing point and find a boat. We can cross tomorrow."

Tang Sanzang heard it too from his horse - indeed there were drums and cymbals. "That's not Taoist music, it must be Buddhist. Let's go." Monkey led the horse in front as they followed the sound. There was no proper path, just low-lying sandy beaches, but they saw a cluster of houses, perhaps four or five hundred of them. They were well-built homes, situated against the mountains with paths leading through, and beside the shore near streams.

Everywhere brushwood gates were closed,  
Each home had bamboo courtyards shut.  
By the sand, sleeping egrets dreamed pure thoughts,  
Beyond willows, crying cuckoos had cold voices.  
Short flutes were silent,  
Cold fulling blocks made no sound.  
Red water-pepper stems swayed in moonlight,  
Yellow reed leaves battled the wind.  
Village dogs barked at sparse fences,  
Old fishermen slept in anchored boats.  
Lights were few,  
Human smoke was quiet,  
The half-moon hung like a mirror in the sky.  
Suddenly came a whiff of white water-chestnuts' fragrance,  
Carried by the west wind from across the shore.

Tang Sanzang dismounted and saw a house by the road with a banner pole outside. Inside, lamps and candles glowed brightly, and incense smoke wafted fragrantly. Tang Sanzang said, "Wukong, this place is different from that mountain hollow by the river. Under people's eaves, we can shelter from the cold dew and sleep peacefully. Don't all come with me - let me go to this ceremony-holder's door first to ask. If they'll take us in, I'll call for you all. If not, don't make trouble. Your faces are ugly, and I fear you'll frighten people and cause problems, leaving us with nowhere to stay."

Monkey said, "That makes sense. Please go first, Master, and we'll wait here." The Master took off his bamboo hat, showing his bare head, brushed off his kasaya robe, and carrying his monk's staff, walked straight to the house door. Seeing the door half-open, Tang Sanzang didn't dare enter directly. After standing there briefly, an old man came out from inside, wearing prayer beads around his neck and chanting "Amitabha Buddha," coming to close the door. The Master quickly put his palms together and called out, "Old benefactor, this poor monk greets you."

The old man returned the greeting and said, "Monk, you've come too late." Tang Sanzang asked, "What do you mean?" The old man replied, "If you had come earlier, my household was offering food to monks - three sheng of cooked rice, a length of white cloth, and ten copper coins each. Why have you come at this hour?" Tang Sanzang bowed and said, "Old benefactor, this poor monk is not here for alms. I am sent from the Great Tang in the East to fetch scriptures from the West. Having arrived here at nightfall and hearing the sound of drums and cymbals at your residence, I've come specially to ask for lodging for one night, and will continue my journey at dawn."

The old man waved his hand and said, "Monk, don't tell lies. From the Great Tang in the East to here is fifty-four thousand li. How could you have come alone like this?" Tang Sanzang said, "Old benefactor, you're quite right, but I still have three junior disciples who clear the way through mountains and build bridges across waters, protecting this poor monk, allowing me to reach here." The old man said, "If you have disciples, why didn't they come together? Please, please come in, my house has room for you to rest." Tang Sanzang turned back and called, "Disciples, come here!"

Monkey was naturally impatient, Bajie was inherently crude, and Sha Monk was also rather rough. When they heard their master call, they led the horse and carried the luggage, rushing in like a whirlwind without any manners. The old man saw them and fell to the ground in fright, crying out, "Demons have come! Demons have come!" Tang Sanzang helped him up, saying, "Benefactor, don't be afraid - these are my disciples." The old man trembled and said, "How can such a handsome master have such ugly disciples!"

Tang Sanzang said, "Though their appearances are unsightly, they are capable of subduing dragons and tigers, capturing monsters and demons." The old man seemed half-believing and half-doubting as he supported Tang Sanzang walking slowly.

Meanwhile, those three fierce ones had barged into the hall, tied up the horse, and put down the luggage. In the hall, there were several monks chanting sutras. Bajie, cupping his long snout, shouted, "What sutras are you monks chanting?" When those monks heard the question and suddenly looked up to see the newcomers - one with a long snout and big ears, one with a huge body and broad shoulders, and a voice like thunder - and Monkey and Sha Monk with even uglier faces, not one of the monks in the hall wasn't terrified.

The monks tried to continue their chanting,  
The leader told them to stop.  
They couldn't mind the bells and chimes,  
They dropped their Buddha statues.  
All at once they blew out the lamps,  
Scattering in the flickering light.  
Stumbling and crawling about,  
None could cross the threshold!  
Heads knocked against heads,  
Like fallen gourds on a rack.  
A solemn Buddhist ceremony  
Turned into a great farce.

The three brothers, seeing everyone stumbling and crawling around, clapped their hands and roared with laughter. The monks became even more frightened, bumping their heads and hitting their faces as they fled for their lives, all running away completely. Tang Sanzang, supporting the old man, came up to the hall where all the lights were out, while the three were still laughing. Tang Sanzang scolded them: "You wretches, utterly lacking in goodness! I teach you daily and remind you constantly. The ancients said, 'Those who are good without being taught - what sages they are! Those who become good after being taught - they are worthy indeed! Those who remain bad even after being taught - what fools they are!' You lot who make such trouble are truly the lowest and most foolish kind! Barging in without knowing proper behavior, frightening the old benefactor, scaring away the chanting monks, ruining these people's good deeds - haven't you brought sin upon me?"

This made them unable to respond. The old man now believed they were indeed his disciples and quickly bowed, saying, "Venerable ones, it's nothing, it's nothing. The lamps were just put out and the ceremony was about to end anyway." Bajie said, "Since it's finished, bring out the farewell feast for us to eat and then we can sleep." The old man called out, "Light the lamps! Light the lamps!"

When the household heard this, they were startled and confused: "There were so many candles for the ceremony in the hall, why is he calling for more lights?" Several servants came out to look, and in the darkness, they brought fire torches and lanterns. But when they suddenly saw Bajie and Sha Monk, they dropped their torches in fright, rushed back to close the middle door, and shouted inside, "Demons have come! Demons have come!"

Monkey picked up the torch, lit the lamps and candles, pulled over a chair, and invited Tang Sanzang to sit. He and his brothers sat on both sides, with the old man sitting in front. As they were getting settled, they heard the inner door open and another old man came out, leaning on a walking stick, saying, "What evil spirits dare come to our virtuous household at night?" The old man who had been sitting quickly got up and met him behind the screen, saying, "Brother, don't shout. They're not evil spirits but arhats from the Great Tang in the East seeking scriptures. Though the disciples look fierce, they are truly good despite their ugly appearance."

Only then did the other old man put down his walking stick and exchanged greetings with the four of them. After the greetings, he also sat in front and called, "Bring tea! Prepare the meal!" He called several times, but the servants, trembling with fear, dared not come near. Bajie couldn't help asking, "Old man, what's all this coming and going about?" The old man said, "I'm telling them to bring food to serve you, venerable ones." Bajie asked, "How many people will serve?" The old man replied, "Eight people." Bajie asked, "Which one will they serve?" The old man said, "To serve all four of you."

Bajie said, "The white-faced master only needs one person; the hairy thunder-face needs two people; the gloomy-faced one needs eight people; I need twenty people to serve me properly." The old man said, "From what you say, it seems you have quite an appetite." Bajie said, "It's passable." The old man said, "We have people, we have people." He called out thirty or forty people, both young and old.

As the monk and the old men were talking back and forth with questions and answers, the people gradually lost their fear. They set up a table at the top for Tang Sanzang to sit at; three tables on the sides for the three disciples; and a table in front for the two old men. First, they arranged vegetarian dishes and fruits, followed by noodles, rice, snacks, and soup, all laid out neatly. Tang Sanzang picked up his chopsticks and first recited a Meal-Starting Sutra. But that fool Bajie, being both hasty and hungry, couldn't wait for Tang Sanzang to finish his sutra. He grabbed a red-lacquered wooden bowl, scooped up a bowl of white rice, and with a "plop," swallowed it down in one gulp.

A servant at the side said, "This venerable one is really careless - instead of using the steamed buns, he swallowed the rice whole. Won't that soil his clothes?" Bajie laughed, "I didn't spill any, I ate it." The servant said, "You didn't even raise your mouth, how could you have eaten it?" Bajie said, "Child, are you telling lies? I clearly ate it. If you don't believe me, watch me eat another bowl." The servants brought another bowl and filled it with rice for Bajie. He tossed it back with a shake, and it was gone again. The servants exclaimed, "Lord! Your throat must be lined with tiles - it's so smooth and quick!"

Tang Sanzang hadn't even finished one sutra, but Bajie had already downed five or six bowls. Then they all began eating together. The fool didn't distinguish between rice and noodles, fruits or snacks - he just grabbed and gobbled everything, still shouting "More rice! More rice!" until gradually nothing more came! Monkey called out, "Brother, eat less! It's still better than starving in the mountain hollow. Being half-full is good enough." Bajie said, "What nonsense! As they say, 'Better to bury a monk alive than let him go hungry from a meal.'" Monkey ordered, "Clear away the dishes and ignore him!"

The two old men bowed and said, "To be honest with you, venerable ones, during the day we wouldn't worry - we could feed even a hundred monks with such a big belly. But it's late now, and we only prepared one stone of noodles, five dou of rice, and several tables of vegetarian dishes for our relatives and monks to share blessings. We didn't expect your arrival, which scared away the monks and our relatives didn't dare come. Everything was served to you. If you're not full, we can cook more." Bajie said, "Cook more! Cook more!"

After the dishes and tables were cleared, Tang Sanzang joined his palms and thanked them for the meal, then asked, "Old benefactor, what is your surname?" The old man replied, "Chen." Tang Sanzang joined his palms again and said, "Then we share the same clan." The old man asked, "You're also surnamed Chen?" Tang Sanzang said, "Yes, my lay family was also named Chen. May I ask what ceremony you were performing earlier?" Bajie laughed and said, "Master, why ask? Surely it must be a Green Sprout Ceremony, or a Peace Ceremony, or a Completion Ceremony."

The old man said, "No, no, it's not." Tang Sanzang asked again, "Then what exactly is it for?" The old man replied, "It's a pre-death ceremony." Bajie laughed so hard he nearly fell over and said, "Old man, you really lack judgment! Do you think we're bridge-building con men? How could monks not know about ceremonies? There are pre-death deposit ceremonies and pre-death repayment ceremonies, but where have you heard of a pre-death ceremony? No one in your family has died, so why hold a death ceremony?"

Hearing this, Monkey secretly delighted, thinking, "This fool has become quite clever." He said, "Old sir, you must have misspoken. How can there be a pre-death ceremony?" The two old men bowed slightly and said, "Why did you come here instead of taking the main road to seek your scriptures?" Monkey said, "We were on the main road, but we saw a body of water blocking our way and couldn't cross. Hearing the sound of drums and cymbals, we specially came to your house to seek lodging."

The old men asked, "When you were by the water, did you see anything?" Monkey said, "We only saw a stone tablet with 'Heavenly River' written on it, and below it 'Eight hundred miles across, rarely crossed since ancient times' - ten characters. Nothing else." The old men said, "If you walk up the bank a bit further, about a li from that tablet, there's a temple to the Great King of Spiritual Response. Didn't you see it?" Monkey said, "No, we didn't. Please tell us, what's this Spiritual Response about?" The two old men began weeping together and said, "Ah, venerable ones! That Great King:

His response aids one region with temples built,  
His divine power protects the people for thousands of miles.  
Year after year he bestows sweet dew on our villages,  
Season after season he drops auspicious clouds on our homes."

Monkey said, "Bestowing sweet dew and dropping auspicious clouds are good things, but why are you so distressed and grieved?" The old men stamped their feet, beat their chests, and with a sob said, "Venerable ones!

Though his grace is great, there's still resentment,  
Though he shows mercy, he still harms people.  
Just because he demands to eat boys and girls,  
He's not a righteous and upright god."

Monkey asked, "He wants to eat boys and girls?" The old men said, "Yes." Monkey asked, "I suppose it must be your family's turn?" The old men said, "Indeed it is. We have a hundred households living here in this place called Chen Family Village, under the jurisdiction of Yuan Meeting County in the Cart-Slow Kingdom. This Great King requires a sacrifice once a year, demanding one boy and one girl, along with livestock and wine to offer to him. After he eats them, he ensures our wind and rain are favorable. If we don't make the sacrifice, he brings disasters and calamities."

Monkey asked, "How many sons do you have in your household?" The old man beat his chest and said, "How pitiful! How shameful! This is my younger brother Chen Qing, and I am Chen Cheng. I am sixty-three years old, and he is fifty-eight. We both struggled to have children. I had no son even at fifty, so relatives persuaded me to take a concubine. I had no choice but to find another wife, who bore me a daughter who is just eight years old this year, named One Tael of Gold."

Bajie said, "What a precious name! Why call her One Tael of Gold?" The old man said, "Because we had such difficulty having children, we built bridges, repaired roads, constructed temples, and erected pagodas, giving alms to monks. We kept an account book - three taels spent here, five taels there. By the year she was born, we had spent thirty jin of gold. Thirty jin makes one tael, so we named her One Tael of Gold."

Monkey asked, "What about the son?" The old man said, "My younger brother has a son, also from a concubine, who is seven years old this year, named Chen Guanbao." Monkey asked, "Why this name?" The old man replied, "We worship Lord Guan at home, and because we prayed at Lord Guan's altar for this son, we named him Guanbao. Between us brothers, who are over a hundred years old combined, we only have these two children. Unfortunately, it's now our turn to make the sacrifice. The feelings between father and child are hard to sever, so we're holding this ceremony in advance for the children's salvation - that's why it's called a pre-death ceremony."

Hearing this, Tang Sanzang couldn't hold back his tears and said, "This truly confirms the ancient saying: 'The green plums fall before the yellow ones; Heaven particularly harms those without sons.'" Monkey laughed and said, "Let me ask you more. Old sir, how much property do you have?" The two old men said, "We do have some: forty or fifty qing of paddy fields, sixty or seventy qing of dry fields, eighty or ninety pastures, two to three hundred water buffalo, twenty or thirty horses and donkeys, and countless pigs, sheep, chickens, and geese. We also have stored grain we can't eat and clothes we can't wear. We can count all our family wealth and property."

Monkey said, "You must have saved all this through being frugal." The old man asked, "How can you tell we're frugal?" Monkey said, "With such wealth, how can you bear to sacrifice your own children? Spend fifty taels of silver to buy a boy, spend a hundred taels to buy a girl - with wrapping costs it wouldn't be more than two hundred taels. Then you could keep your own children for your descendants. Wouldn't that be good?"

The two old men wept and said, "Venerable one, you don't understand. That Great King is truly spiritually responsive - he often walks among our households." Monkey asked, "When he walks among you, what does he look like? How tall is he?" The old men said, "We never see his form. We only smell a fragrant breeze and know the Great King has come. We immediately fill the incense burners and everyone, young and old, bows toward the wind. He knows everything about our households, down to the smallest details, and knows the birth dates and times of everyone, young and old. He only accepts children born to our own families. Even if we had several million taels of silver, we couldn't buy children who match the exact year and month of birth."

Monkey said, "I see, I see. Well then, bring out your son for me to look at." Chen Qing hurried inside and brought out Guanbao to the lamp-lit hall. The child, not knowing about life and death, was playing with his sleeves full of fruits and jumping around. Seeing this, Monkey silently recited a spell and shook his body, transforming into an exact copy of Guanbao. The two children held hands and danced in front of the lamps, frightening the old men so much they knelt before Tang Sanzang and said, "Venerable sir, this is outrageous! This venerable one was just talking to us, how did he suddenly transform to look exactly like my son, answering and moving in unison! You're shortening our lives! Please return to your original form!"

Monkey wiped his face once and returned to his true appearance. The old men knelt before him and said, "Venerable one, so you have such abilities." Monkey laughed and asked, "Do I look like your son?" The old men said, "Identical! The same face, the same voice, the same clothes, the same height and build." Monkey said, "Would you like to weigh us to see if we're the same weight?" The old men said, "Yes, yes, yes, exactly the same weight."

Monkey asked, "Would this work for the sacrifice?" The old men said, "Perfect, perfect! It would work perfectly!" Monkey said, "I'll substitute for this child's life, preserve your family's incense lineage. I'll go make the sacrifice to that Great King." Chen Qing knelt down and kowtowed, saying, "If the venerable one is truly so merciful as to substitute, I will give one thousand taels of silver to Master Tang for his journey to the West." Monkey said, "Won't you thank old Sun as well?" The old man said, "Once you're sacrificed, you'll be gone." Monkey asked, "How will I be gone?" The old man said, "He'll eat you." Monkey laughed, "He dares to eat me?" The old man said, "If he doesn't eat you, he must find you too smelly."

Monkey laughed and said, "Let fate decide. If he eats me, my life was short; if he doesn't, it's my good fortune. I'll go make the sacrifice for you." Chen Qing kept kowtowing in thanks and promised another five hundred taels of silver, but Chen Cheng neither kowtowed nor expressed thanks, just leaned against the screen door crying bitterly. Monkey understood and went to pull him, saying, "Elder sir, you don't approve of me and don't thank me - is it because you can't bear to part with your daughter?"

Only then did Chen Cheng kneel down and say, "Yes, I can't bear it. Though I'm grateful for your grand gesture in saving my nephew, I am childless except for this one daughter. Even after I die, she would mourn me deeply - how can I bear to part with her!" Monkey said, "Quickly steam five dou of rice and prepare some good vegetarian dishes for my long-snouted master to eat. Have him transform into your daughter, and we brothers will go together to make the sacrifice. We'll do a complete good deed and save both your children's lives. How about that?"

When Bajie heard this, he was greatly shocked and said, "Brother, you want to show off and don't care if I live or die - you're just dragging me in!" Monkey said, "Brother, as they say, 'A chicken doesn't eat unearned food.' We've entered their home and enjoyed their grand feast - you were even complaining it wasn't enough! How can you not help them through their difficulties?"

Bajie said, "Brother, I want to help, but I fear that Great King really has spiritual powers and will kill me." Monkey said, "Don't worry! When I go, I'll protect you. Even if he has great spiritual powers, he won't dare touch you. If he dares to touch even one hair of yours, I'll tear down his temple, destroy his spirit tablet, and make him cease to exist!" Bajie said, "Brother, your words are reliable. Everyone knows your abilities - go ahead and transform yourself first."

Monkey said, "I don't need to transform yet. Have them bring out the girl for me to see." Chen Cheng hurried inside and brought out One Tael of Gold. The girl was quite pretty:

Her face like the full moon's brilliance,  
Her spirit like a blooming flower.  
Small red lips above a dimpled chin,  
Bright eyes beneath dark brows.  
Her hair done in double buns with gold pins,  
Her body wrapped in embroidered silk.  
Though only eight years old,  
Already showing signs of beauty.

Bajie saw her and said, "Brother, I can't transform into that!" Monkey asked, "Why not?" Bajie said, "My face is too ugly, my mouth too long, my ears too big - I can't possibly match her delicate features." Monkey said, "You don't need to match her exactly. Just capture her general appearance, that's all. The important thing is to save a life." Only then did Bajie agree.

The old men quickly ordered the servants to prepare rice. They brought out good vegetarian dishes and fruits, and Bajie ate his fill. Then Monkey taught him the transformation spell. That Bajie really had some ability - he shook his body and transformed into the appearance of One Tael of Gold, looking exactly like her in face and dress, though a bit taller. Monkey looked at him and laughed, "Brother, you're too tall. Shrink a little." Bajie withdrew his magic slightly and became the right height.

Monkey said, "Now that's better. Brother, stay here while I go transform." He jumped down from the steps, shook his body, and transformed into the exact appearance of Guanbao. The two old men were overjoyed and ordered the household to prepare the sacrificial offerings. They brought out all kinds of fruits, wines, livestock, and paper money. The two transformed disciples were to go together with two servants carrying lanterns to make the offering.

Tang Sanzang said, "Disciples, be careful." Monkey said, "Master, don't worry. When we've finished this good deed, we'll come back." The two left with the servants carrying lanterns and walked about half a li before seeing the temple. Indeed:

Dark clouds gathered overhead,  
Cold winds blew all around.  
Temple walls reached to the sky,  
The main gate stood solemnly.  
Stone lions crouched fiercely,  
Bronze bells hung imposingly.  
Truly a place of spiritual power,  
A temple of divine response.  
A fragrant breeze stirred faintly,  
As incense smoke curled upward.  
Dark tiles gleamed like black gold,  
Red columns stood like crimson jade.  
Dragon carvings seemed alive,  
Phoenix designs appeared to dance.  
Before the hall stretched broad steps,  
Behind stood screen walls decorated.  
Such majesty struck fear in hearts,  
As demons showed their might here.

The servants set up an offering table before the hall, arranged the wine and food, lit the candles, and burned paper money. Monkey and Bajie stood on either side of the table. After everything was ready, the servants kowtowed and said, "Great King, the Chen family has brought the boy Chen Guanbao and the girl One Tael of Gold as offerings. The wine and food are all prepared - please come out and receive them." After saying this three times, they ran away, leaving Monkey and Bajie alone.

Bajie became frightened and said, "Brother, the servants have run away. What should we do?" Monkey said, "Don't worry, let me see what kind of monster he is." Just as he spoke, a gust of fragrant wind arose from behind the temple. Bajie trembled and said, "Brother, the wind is coming!" Monkey said, "I know."

The two watched as the wind grew stronger. What a wind!

Howling through empty halls,  
Shaking the forest trees.  
Howling through empty halls, the whole earth grows dark;  
Shaking the forest trees, mountains lose their color.  
Temple banners flutter wildly,  
Bronze bells clang without hands.  
Sand flies up to block the moon,  
Dust rises to hide the stars.  
Growing stronger and stronger,  
Blowing harder and harder.  
Like a dragon diving in the sea,  
Like a tiger descending the mountain.  
This wind could overturn oceans,  
And surely topple Heaven's gates.

In this fierce wind, they heard something approaching from behind the main hall. Monkey looked carefully and saw it was a python spirit about seventy or eighty feet long and as thick as a bucket. It had scales like copper coins, teeth like swords, and two eyes that shone like golden lamps. It came slithering straight toward them with its mouth wide open.

Bajie was so scared his soul nearly left his body. He called out, "Brother, that's bad! He's coming to eat us!" Monkey laughed, "Don't move, let me talk to him." He stepped forward and shouted, "Slowly, slowly! I am Sun Wukong, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven from five hundred years ago. I've come specially to see what kind of demon you are, eating children year after year. Today you dare to open your mouth to eat old Sun - I'll grab your tongue and pull it out!"

That monster flicked its tongue and tried to swallow Monkey. Monkey used his transformation ability to shrink his body and leap into its mouth. The monster closed its jaws with a snap, thinking it had swallowed Monkey. Bajie was terrified and said, "That's terrible! My elder brother has been eaten by that evil spirit!" But Monkey was using his magical powers inside the monster's belly. He grew until he was over thirty feet tall, forcing the monster's stomach to swell enormously. The monster raised its head to the sky, wanting to call out but unable to make a sound. It thrashed its tail wildly, beating up dust and stones.

Seeing this, Bajie thought, "That monster is having trouble - my brother must be causing havoc in its belly." He shook off his transformation, pulled out his rake, and struck at the monster's head. The monster defended with its head lowered, so Bajie hit its tail instead. Unable to bear the pain from both inside and out, the monster crashed through the temple wall and fled toward the river bank.

Bajie chased after it, shouting, "Don't run! Take this from my rake!" The monster plunged into the river. Bajie stood on the bank and called, "Brother, come out! Come out!" Shortly after, bubbles rose from the river, followed by Monkey emerging from the water. Bajie helped him up and asked, "Brother, how did you get out?" Monkey said, "That monster's belly was too cramped for me to use my cudgel. I saw it was running to the river, so I let it dive in. When it opened its mouth underwater, I slipped out. It's not worth fighting anymore - let's go back and tell Master."

Bajie said, "Brother, we should find it and kill it. Otherwise, it might come back to harass the village again." Monkey said, "It won't dare. I've already screwed up its guts - it won't dare show its face here again. Let's go back." The two of them returned to the Chen family home.

When they arrived at the gate, they found Tang Sanzang, Sha Monk, and the entire household waiting anxiously. Seeing the two return, they all gathered around asking questions. Monkey told them everything about how he had entered the monster's belly and how it had fled to the river. The two old men immediately set up incense and bowed in thanks, saying, "Blessed day! Blessed day! You've saved our children's lives and rid our village of this evil!" They ordered a feast to be prepared to thank the monks.

Tang Sanzang said, "We've already eaten. There's no need for another feast. It's late now - just prepare some places for us to rest. We'll leave early tomorrow morning." The old men consented and had the servants prepare beds in the main hall. Master and disciples settled down to rest.

That night, Chen Qing gathered all the relatives of the village. They collected five hundred ounces of silver, prepared a huge farewell feast, and at dawn, they all came to thank the monks. Tang Sanzang firmly declined the silver, saying, "We are monks who have left home - how can we accept money? You've shown us great kindness with food and lodging - that's more than enough." The old men and the villagers kept insisting, kowtowing and saying, "Venerable masters, you've saved our children's lives. This small token cannot begin to repay your kindness. Please accept it for incense and oil money on your journey." Tang Sanzang steadfastly refused.

Monkey said, "Since the benefactors are so sincere, we shouldn't completely refuse. Take a tenth of it - fifty ounces - for travel expenses." The old men were delighted and handed over fifty ounces of silver. They also prepared ten tables of vegetarian food. After the meal, they packed some dry provisions for the journey. Only then did master and disciples take their leave.

The entire village, young and old, came out to send them off, burning incense and seeing them off for over ten li before returning. Indeed:

Through great mercy, children's lives were saved,  
Evil was conquered by the dharma's might.

If you wish to know what happened next on their journey, listen to the explanation in the next chapter.

**Chapter 68 "Tang Monk Discusses Past Lives in the Land of Zhumu; Sun Wukong Performs Three Medical Treatments"**

When good deeds gather all karma is resolved,  
Fame spreads throughout the four continents.  
Wisdom's light illuminates the other shore,  
Whirling, swirling clouds rise to heaven's edge.  
All Buddhas share their blessings,  
Forever dwelling in jade towers for countless autumns.  
Breaking through the mortal butterfly dream,  
Rest, rest - cleansed of dust, free from sorrow.

The story tells of Tang Sanzang and his disciples, who left the filthy alley and ascended the carefree path. Time passed swiftly, and it was now the height of summer:

Pomegranate flowers burst like silk,  
Lotus leaves spread their green plates.  
Young swallows hide in willow rows,  
Travelers wave fans to escape the heat.

As they traveled forward, they suddenly saw a city ahead. Tang Sanzang reined in his horse and called out, "Disciples, what place is that ahead?" Wukong said, "Master, you really can't read? How did you manage to accept the Emperor's mission to leave the court?" Tang Sanzang replied, "I've been a monk since childhood and am well-versed in thousands of scriptures. How can you say I can't read?" Wukong said, "If you can read, why don't you recognize the three large characters on that apricot-yellow banner on the city wall, and instead ask what place this is?"

Tang Sanzang shouted, "You foolish ape, talking nonsense! The banner is fluttering in the wind - even if there were characters, how could one read them clearly?" Wukong said, "Then how can I see them?" Bajie and Sha Monk said, "Master, don't listen to elder brother's tricks. From this distance, we can barely make out the city walls, how could anyone see what characters are written?" Wukong said, "Doesn't it say 'Land of Zhumu' in three characters?" Tang Sanzang said, "Since this is the Land of Zhumu, a Western kingdom, we'll need to have our travel document verified." Wukong said, "No need to discuss further."

Soon they arrived at the city gate, dismounted to cross the bridge, and entered through three layers of gates. It was truly a magnificent imperial city!

They saw:  
Towering gate buildings,  
Battlements neatly arranged.  
Flowing water all around,  
High mountains north and south.  
Rich merchants crowd six streets and three markets,  
Thousands of households thrive in business.  
Truly an imperial capital,  
A great heavenly city.  
Ships arrive from distant lands,  
Jade and silk fill the markets.  
Mountains stretch to the horizon,  
Palace walls touch the clear sky.  
Three gates firmly locked,  
Ten thousand years of peace and prosperity.

As they walked along the main street, they saw people of noble bearing, properly dressed, speaking in refined tones - truly no less civilized than the Great Tang. But when the merchants on both sides saw Zhu Bajie's ugly appearance, Sha Monk's dark tall form, and Sun Wukong's hairy face, they abandoned their business to crowd around and stare. Tang Sanzang kept saying, "Don't cause trouble! Keep your heads down!"

Bajie complied, tucking his snout-like mouth into his chest, and Sha Monk dared not raise his eyes, while Wukong looked east and west as he stayed close to Tang Sanzang's side. Some of the more sensible people watched briefly and then left. But the idlers and street urchins gathered in laughing crowds, throwing tiles and stones to tease Bajie. Tang Sanzang was sweating with anxiety, repeatedly saying, "Don't cause trouble!" The idiot didn't dare raise his head.

After a while, they turned a corner and suddenly saw a building with "Guest Reception Hall" written above its gate. Tang Sanzang said, "Disciples, let's enter this official building." Wukong asked, "What for?" Tang Sanzang replied, "The Guest Reception Hall is where all visitors from everywhere gather. We can stay here. I'll have an audience with the king to verify our travel document, then we can leave the city and continue our journey." Hearing this, Bajie pulled out his snout, frightening dozens of onlookers to the ground, and said, "Master is right. Let's hide inside to avoid these noisy birds." They entered the hall, and only then did the crowd gradually disperse.

In the hall were two officials, one senior and one junior, who were checking on laborers needed to receive some officials. Seeing Tang Sanzang arrive, they were startled and asked, "Who are you? Where are you going?" Tang Sanzang clasped his hands and said, "This humble monk was sent by the Great Tang Emperor in the East to fetch scriptures from the Western Heaven. Having arrived in your honorable kingdom, we dare not pass through privately. We have travel documents to verify and request temporary lodging in your noble hall." Hearing this, the two officials dismissed their attendants, straightened their clothes and caps, came down from the hall to welcome them, and immediately ordered guest rooms to be prepared and vegetarian meals to be arranged. Tang Sanzang expressed his thanks. The two officials then left with their laborers.

The attendants invited their honored guests to rest in the guest rooms. As Tang Sanzang started walking, Wukong complained, "These lazy fellows! Why don't they let old Sun stay in the main hall?" Tang Sanzang said, "This place is not under our Great Tang's jurisdiction, nor are our countries connected. Moreover, they frequently receive visiting officials, so it wouldn't be appropriate to occupy the main hall." Wukong said, "If that's the case, I insist on being treated properly!"

Just then, a steward brought provisions: a plate of white rice, a plate of flour, two bunches of green vegetables, four pieces of tofu, two gluten cakes, a plate of dried bamboo shoots, and a plate of black fungus. Tang Sanzang told his disciples to accept the food and thanked the steward. The steward said, "There are clean stoves and kitchen supplies in the west wing, with firewood readily available. Please prepare your own meals." Tang Sanzang asked, "May I ask if the king is holding court?"

The steward replied, "Our Emperor hasn't held court for a long time. Today, being an auspicious day, he is discussing the posting of a yellow proclamation with his civil and military officials. If you need to verify your travel documents, you should hurry there now to catch him. By tomorrow, who knows how long you might have to wait." Tang Sanzang said, "Wukong, you all prepare the meal here while I quickly go to verify our travel documents. I'll return to eat before we continue our journey." Bajie hurriedly took out the cassock and travel documents. As Tang Sanzang prepared to go to court, he strictly instructed his disciples not to go out and cause trouble.

Soon he arrived at the Five Phoenix Tower. Words cannot describe the majesty of the palace halls and the grandeur of the towers. When he reached the imperial gate, he asked the officials to report to the throne that a monk from the Great Tang in the East, traveling to the Western Heaven to fetch scriptures, wished to verify his travel documents. The gate official indeed went to the jade steps and announced: "Outside the imperial gate is a monk sent by the Great Tang to fetch scriptures from Thunder Monastery in the Western Heaven. He wishes to verify his travel documents and requests an audience."

Hearing this, the king said with joy, "I have been ill and unable to hold court for a long time. Today I came to the throne to post a proclamation seeking doctors, and now a high monk has arrived in our kingdom!" He immediately issued an order to summon Tang Sanzang to the steps of the throne. Tang Sanzang bowed and prostrated himself. The king then ordered him to ascend to the golden hall and be seated, commanding the Imperial Kitchen to prepare a vegetarian meal. Tang Sanzang expressed his thanks and presented his travel documents.

After reading them, the king was greatly pleased and asked, "Venerable Master, in your Great Tang, how many righteous rulers have there been? How many worthy ministers? And why did the Tang Emperor, after falling ill and recovering, send you to seek scriptures across mountains and rivers?"

The monk, in response to these questions, bowed and clasped his hands, saying: "In my land, the Three Sovereigns established order, the Five Emperors divided their domains. Yao and Shun took their positions, Yu and Tang brought peace to the people. The Zhou Dynasty with its many sons each established their territories. The strong oppressed the weak, and separate kingdoms were declared. Eighteen feudal states divided the borderlands. Later, twelve states maintained universal peace. Without chariots and horses, they began to conquer each other. Seven powerful states competed, until six were united under Qin. Heaven gave rise to Liu Bang, though not all were benevolent. The empire passed to Han, establishing laws to be followed. Han fell to the Sima family, then Jin split apart. South and North saw twelve kingdoms, including Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen. Ancestors succeeded each other until the great Sui inherited truth. But pleasure-seeking brought disorder and people suffered greatly. Our Li family took power, establishing the Tang Dynasty. After Gaozu passed away, today's Emperor Taizong rules. Rivers are clear and seas calm under his great virtue and benevolence."

"Recently, north of Chang'an city, there was a troublesome dragon spirit who maliciously withheld rainfall when he should have been punished. He appeared in a dream at night, begging the Emperor for mercy. The Emperor agreed to pardon him and summoned his wise minister. While detained in the palace, they played chess leisurely. At noon, that wise minister dreamed he executed the dragon."

Hearing this, the king suddenly groaned and asked, "Venerable Master, from which kingdom did that wise minister come?" Tang Sanzang replied, "He was our Emperor's Prime Minister, Wei Zheng. He could read the heavens, understand earth's principles, and discern yin and yang - truly a great minister who helped secure the state. Because he executed the Jing River Dragon King in his dream, the Dragon King complained to the underworld that our Emperor had promised to save him but then killed him instead. Thus our Emperor fell ill and his life was in danger. Wei Zheng then wrote a letter for our Emperor to take to the underworld, addressed to Judge Cui Jue in Fengdu City. Shortly after, the Tang Emperor died but returned to life after three days. Thanks to Wei Zheng and Judge Cui's modification of the documents, the Emperor was granted twenty more years of life. Now he wishes to hold grand Buddhist ceremonies on water and land, so he sent this humble monk to journey far and wide, consulting various kingdoms, to worship the Buddha and obtain the Great Vehicle scriptures, hoping to help suffering souls ascend to heaven."

The king sighed again and said, "Truly a great empire with wise ruler and capable ministers! I have been ill for so long, yet none of my ministers can save me." The monk, hearing this, secretly observed that the Emperor appeared yellow-faced, thin, and weak, his spirit and strength depleted. Just as the monk was about to inquire further, an official from the Imperial Kitchen announced that the vegetarian meal for the Tang monk was ready. The king ordered it to be set up in the Fragrant Hall, to be shared with the monk. Tang Sanzang expressed his thanks, and they went together to take their meal.

Meanwhile, back at the Guest Reception Hall, Wukong had Sha Monk prepare tea and food, including vegetarian dishes. Sha Monk said, "Tea and rice are easy to prepare, but the vegetables are difficult to arrange." Wukong asked, "Why?" Sha Monk replied, "We have no oil, salt, soy sauce, or vinegar." Wukong said, "I have some pocket money here. Let Bajie go to the market to buy some." But the idiot refused, saying, "I dare not go. My face is too ugly - I might cause trouble and Master would blame me." Wukong said, "It's just fair trade, not cheating or robbing anyone. What trouble could there be?"

Bajie said, "Didn't you see just now? When I pulled out my snout at the gate, I frightened ten or more people to the ground. In a crowded marketplace, who knows how many people I might frighten to death!" Wukong asked, "You only know about the crowded marketplace, but did you see what they were selling there?" Bajie replied, "Master told me to keep my head down to avoid trouble, so I really didn't see anything." Wukong said, "Besides the wine shops, rice stores, mills, and silk goods, there are excellent tea houses, noodle shops, big biscuits, large buns, restaurants with good soup, good spices, good vegetables, and various sweets like sugar cakes, steamed pastries, rolls, and honey treats. Shall I buy some for you?"

Hearing this, the idiot began drooling and swallowing hard. He jumped up and said, "Brother, I'll take advantage of your treat this time, and next time when I have money, I'll treat you back." Wukong secretly laughed and said, "Sha Monk, cook the rice well while we go buy seasonings." Sha Monk understood he was teasing Bajie but agreed, saying, "Go ahead, but buy plenty so you can eat your fill."

The idiot grabbed a bowl and followed Wukong out. Two officials asked, "Venerable ones, where are you going?" Wukong replied, "To buy seasonings." They said, "Go west down this street, turn at the drum tower corner, and you'll find Zheng's general store. They have everything - oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, ginger, pepper, and tea."

The two walked hand in hand, heading west down the street. Wukong passed several tea houses and restaurants without buying or eating anything. Bajie called out, "Brother, let's just buy something here." But Wukong, who was merely teasing him, refused, saying, "Brother, you don't know how to do business! Let's walk further and find a bigger shop to eat at." As they talked, more and more people followed them, crowding around to stare.

Soon they reached the drum tower, where countless people were gathered, pushing and shoving, blocking the street. Bajie saw this and said, "Brother, I'm not going any further. There's a commotion ahead - I'm afraid they're arresting monks. Besides, we're strangers who look suspicious. If we're arrested, what then?" Wukong said, "Nonsense! Monks haven't broken any laws, why would they arrest us? Let's go past and buy seasonings at Zheng's store." Bajie said, "No, no! I won't risk trouble. If I squeeze into that crowd and my ears brush against someone, frightening them into falling and dying, I'll be charged with murder!"

Wukong said, "Well then, stand here by the wall while I go buy what we need. I'll buy you some noodles and biscuits too." The idiot handed the bowl to Wukong and pressed his snout against the wall, turning his face away and refusing to move. Wukong walked to the drum tower where indeed the crowd was thick. He squeezed into the throng to listen and found that people were gathered to read an imperial proclamation posted under the tower. Wukong flashed his fiery eyes and golden pupils to read it carefully. The proclamation stated: "We, the King of the Land of Zhumu in Western Buluo, since establishing our realm, have maintained peace in all directions and tranquility among our people. Recently, due to unfortunate circumstances, we have been confined to bed with a lingering illness that shows no sign of improvement. Though our Imperial Medical Academy has repeatedly tried excellent prescriptions, none have been effective. We now issue this proclamation to recruit talented individuals from all lands. Regardless of whether they come from the north, east, central plains, or foreign lands, if anyone has superior medical skills, they are invited to ascend to our royal palace to treat our condition. Should our illness be cured even slightly, we are willing to share our kingdom, and this is no empty promise. Thus we issue this proclamation for all to know."

After reading it, Wukong was delighted and thought, "As the ancient saying goes, 'Every move brings three parts of fortune.' Good thing I didn't stay idle at the guest house. No need to buy seasonings now - let me play doctor for a day and put the scripture-seeking mission on hold." The Great Sage bent down, dropped the bowl, picked up a pinch of dirt, threw it up, and recited a spell to make himself invisible. He quietly went forward, took down the proclamation, and blew a breath of immortal air toward the southeast. As the whirlwind rose, he returned to where Bajie was standing. He found the idiot still pressing his snout against the wall, as if asleep. Without disturbing him, Wukong folded the proclamation and quietly tucked it into Bajie's robe, then turned around and headed back to the Guest Reception Hall.

Meanwhile, when the wind arose at the drum tower, everyone covered their heads and closed their eyes. When they opened them again, the imperial proclamation was gone, and they were all terrified. The proclamation had been brought out by twelve palace eunuchs and twelve imperial guards early that morning, and had been posted for barely three hours before being blown away. They trembled with fear and searched frantically left and right. Suddenly they noticed a piece of paper sticking out of Bajie's robe. They approached him saying, "Did you take down the proclamation?"

The idiot suddenly raised his head, jutted out his snout, and frightened several guards who stumbled and fell. As he turned to leave, some braver ones grabbed him saying, "You took down the imperial proclamation seeking doctors, why aren't you going to the palace to treat our Emperor? Where do you think you're going?" Bajie, flustered, said, "Your son didn't take down any proclamation! Your grandson doesn't know how to treat illness!" The guards said, "What's that in your robe?" Only then did the idiot look down and see the paper. Opening it to look, he gnashed his teeth and cursed, "That monkey has ruined me!" He was about to tear it up when the crowd stopped him, saying, "You must have a death wish! This is our current Emperor's proclamation - who dares to tear it? Since you took it, you must have medical skills. Come with us!"

Bajie shouted, "You don't understand! I didn't take this proclamation - it was my elder brother Sun Wukong who took it and secretly put it in my robe before leaving me here. If you want to clear this up, let me find him for you." The crowd said, "What nonsense! When the bell needs fixing, you don't go looking for the bell-maker! You're the one with the proclamation - why should we look for someone else? Come with us to see the Emperor!" The group, not distinguishing right from wrong, pushed and pulled at Bajie. The idiot planted his feet firmly like roots in the ground - ten or more people couldn't move him. Bajie said, "You don't know what's high or low! If you keep pulling and my stupid temper flares up, don't blame me!"

Soon the commotion drew a crowd of onlookers. Two elderly eunuchs among them said, "With your strange appearance and odd voice, where are you from, acting so stubborn?" Bajie replied, "We're from the East, sent to fetch scriptures from the Western Heaven. My master is the Tang Emperor's royal brother, who just went to court to verify our travel documents. My elder brother and I came to buy seasonings, but seeing the crowd at the drum tower, I didn't dare approach. My elder brother told me to wait here, but he actually saw the proclamation and used a whirlwind to take it down and secretly put it in my robe before leaving."

The eunuchs said, "Earlier we saw a plump, white-faced monk heading toward the palace gate - was that your master?" Bajie said, "Yes, yes!" The eunuchs asked, "Where did your elder brother go?" Bajie replied, "We are four travelers - Master went to verify the travel documents, and we three disciples along with our luggage and horse are staying at the Guest Reception Hall. My elder brother tricked me and went back to the hall first." The eunuchs said, "Guards, don't pull at him. Let's go to the hall together to find out the truth." Bajie said, "You two grannies are sensible." The guards said, "This monk doesn't know proper etiquette! How dare you call the senior eunuchs 'grannies'!"

Bajie laughed, "Shameless! You've confused yin and yang! These two elderly mothers, why not call them grandmothers but instead call them eunuchs!" The crowd said, "Stop joking! Hurry and find your elder brother!" The street was in an uproar with three to five hundred people following them to the hall entrance. Bajie said, "Everyone stop here. My elder brother is not like me who lets you make fun of him - he's a fierce and serious person. When you see him, you must bow deeply and call him 'Lord Sun', then he'll respond. Otherwise, if his expression changes, this matter won't be resolved." The eunuchs and guards all said, "If your elder brother has real abilities and can cure our king, he should receive half the kingdom, and we should indeed bow to him."

The crowd remained outside making noise while Bajie led the eunuchs and guards into the hall. They heard Wukong and Sha Monk in the guest room laughing about taking down the proclamation. Bajie rushed forward, grabbed Wukong and shouted, "Some brother you are! You told me you'd buy me plain noodles, biscuits, and buns, but it was all lies! Then you created a whirlwind to steal some royal proclamation and secretly put it in my robe to frame me! Is this how brothers treat each other?"

Wukong laughed, "You idiot, you must have gone the wrong way somewhere else. I went to the drum tower, bought the seasonings, and came back quickly when I couldn't find you. When did I take any royal proclamation?" Bajie said, "The officials who were watching the proclamation are right here." Before he finished speaking, several eunuchs and guards bowed and said, "Lord Sun, today our king is fortunate that heaven has sent you down. You must display your great talents and use the 'three-fold arm' technique to cure our king's illness. If successful, you'll share the kingdom and divide the state."

Hearing this, Wukong composed himself, took the proclamation from Bajie, and asked the crowd, "Are you the officials who were watching the proclamation?" The eunuchs kowtowed and said, "We are palace eunuchs from the Ceremony Department, and these are imperial guards." Wukong said, "I did indeed take down this medical proclamation and had my junior brother bring you here. Since your ruler is ill, as the saying goes, 'Medicine isn't sold door to door, and doctors aren't sought for illness.' Go tell your king to come invite me personally, and I will cure his illness with a single touch."

The eunuchs were shocked by these words, and the guards said, "Such big talk must mean real ability. Let half of us stay here to keep him company, and half go to the palace to report." They split up, with four eunuchs and six guards going directly to the palace steps to report: "Your Majesty, wonderful news!" The king was still in pleasant conversation with Tang Sanzang after their meal when he heard this report and asked, "What wonderful news?" The eunuchs reported, "This morning when we posted the proclamation seeking doctors at the drum tower, a holy monk named Sun, who came from the Great Tang seeking scriptures, took it down. He is now at the Guest Reception Hall and says the king must personally invite him, as he has the ability to cure illness with a single touch. That's why we've come to report."

The king was overjoyed upon hearing this and asked Tang Sanzang, "Venerable Master, how many distinguished disciples do you have?" Tang Sanzang respectfully replied, "This humble monk has three unruly disciples." The king asked, "Which one is skilled in medicine?" Tang Sanzang said, "To be honest with Your Majesty, my unruly disciples are all rural simpletons. They only know how to carry luggage, find paths, guide me over mountains and across rivers, or perhaps subdue demons, capture tigers, and tame dragons in dangerous places. None of them knows anything about medicine."

The king said, "Venerable Master, why are you being so modest? Today when I ascended the throne and fortunately met you at court, it was truly heaven-sent destiny. If your disciple doesn't know medicine, why would he take down my proclamation and ask me to invite him personally? He must have the ability to cure my illness." He called out, "Civil and military officials, I am weak and frail and dare not ride in the imperial carriage. You must go in my place outside the palace to earnestly invite Master Sun to examine my illness. When you see him, do not treat him lightly. Address him as Divine Monk Sun and treat him with the courtesy due between ruler and minister."

The officials accepted the order and went with the eunuchs and guards to the Guest Reception Hall, where they lined up and bowed in respect. This frightened Bajie into hiding in a side room and Sha Monk to slip behind a wall. But the Great Sage sat calmly in the middle, completely unmoved. Bajie secretly cursed, "This monkey will be the death of us! How can he sit there motionless when so many officials are bowing to him, not even standing up or returning their courtesy!"

After the bows were finished, they formed two lines and announced, "We report to Divine Monk Sun: we are all ministers of the Zhumu Kingdom. We have received the king's command to respectfully invite the Divine Monk to enter the palace and examine his illness." Only then did Wukong stand up and ask, "Why didn't your king come himself?" The officials replied, "Our king is weak and frail, unable to ride in his carriage, so he specially ordered us to perform this ceremony on his behalf to invite the Divine Monk." Wukong said, "In that case, please lead the way. I will follow."

The officials arranged themselves according to rank and marched in formation. Wukong straightened his clothes and rose. Bajie said, "Brother, please don't drag us into this." Wukong said, "I won't mention you, but I need you two to receive medicine for me." Sha Monk asked, "What medicine?" Wukong said, "If anyone brings medicine to me, record and keep it all. Wait for me to return and use it." The two agreed.

Wukong then followed the officials, and in no time they arrived. The officials entered first to report to the king: "Which one is Divine Monk Sun?" Wukong stepped forward and said in a loud voice, "That would be old Sun!" Hearing his fierce voice and seeing his strange appearance, the king was so frightened that he collapsed on his dragon throne. The palace ladies and eunuchs hurriedly supported him back into the inner palace, crying, "You've scared His Majesty to death!"

All the officials reproached Wukong, saying, "How can this monk be so crude and rustic! How dare he take down the proclamation!" Wukong laughed and said, "You gentlemen are wrong to blame me. If I were this polite and weak, your king's illness wouldn't be cured in a thousand years." The officials said, "How long can a person live? Even a thousand years without being cured?" Wukong said, "He's now a sick emperor. When he dies, he'll be a sick ghost. When he reincarnates, he'll be a sick person again. Isn't that being uncured for a thousand years?"

The officials angrily said, "You monk are so disrespectful! How dare you speak such nonsense!" Wukong smiled and said, "It's not nonsense. Listen to my explanation:

The principles of medicine are profound and mysterious,  
The key is having a flexible mind.  
Four aspects: looking, listening, questioning, and pulse-taking,  
Missing one makes the diagnosis incomplete.  
First, observe their spirit, complexion, and demeanor,  
Their vigor or weakness, weight, and sleep patterns.  
Second, listen to their voice, clear or muddy,  
Hear their true words and delirious speech.  
Third, ask how long they've been ill,  
About their eating and drinking, and bodily functions.  
Fourth, feel the pulse to understand the meridians,  
Whether floating or sinking, external or internal.  
Without looking, listening, questioning, and pulse-taking,  
Don't expect to find peace in this life."

Among the civil and military officials was a doctor from the Imperial Medical Academy who, hearing these words, praised them to the others, saying, "This monk speaks reasonably. Even immortals examining patients must look, listen, question, and take the pulse - this follows the principles of the divine sages' medical arts." Following this opinion, the officials had an attendant report: "The Divine Monk needs to use the four diagnostic methods of looking, listening, questioning, and pulse-taking to identify the illness before prescribing medicine."

The king, lying on his dragon bed, kept calling out, "Send him away! I cannot bear to see strangers!" When the attendant came out with this message, Wukong said, "If he cannot see strangers, I know how to diagnose by suspended thread." The officials were secretly pleased and said, "Diagnosing by suspended thread - we've heard of it but never seen it. Let's report this." The attendant went back into the palace and reported, "Your Majesty, that Sun the Divine Monk says if he cannot see Your Majesty's face, he can diagnose by suspended thread."

The king thought to himself, "I've been ill for three years but never tried this method," and said, "Let him come in." The attendant quickly transmitted the message: "His Majesty has agreed to diagnosis by suspended thread. Quickly summon Sun the Divine Monk to enter the palace for examination." Wukong then ascended the precious hall, where Tang Sanzang met him and scolded, "You wretched ape, you've ruined me!" Wukong smiled and said, "Good master, I'm bringing you honor, yet you say I'm ruining you?"

Tang Sanzang shouted, "In all these years following me, when have you ever cured anyone? You don't know medical properties or have any knowledge of medical texts. How dare you recklessly cause such trouble!" Wukong laughed, "Master, you don't understand. I have a few herbal prescriptions that can cure serious illnesses. If I succeed in curing him, that's fine. Even if I kill him with malpractice, the worst crime would be that of a quack causing death - it's not a capital offense. Don't worry! Don't worry! Just sit and watch how I take his pulse."

While they were talking, a palace attendant came to lead Wukong inside. At the door of the royal bedchamber, an elderly eunuch held up a red silk thread. Wukong said, "Old fellow, you must be careful. Don't let the thread touch any other person's hand - it must connect directly from His Majesty's wrist to my hand." The eunuch acknowledged and carefully carried the thread inside, tying one end to the king's left wrist. The other end was passed through a window crack to Wukong's hand.

Wukong held the thread for a while and announced, "Your Majesty's illness stems from worry and anxiety. The internal organs are damaged, affecting both the spleen and stomach. You can't eat or drink, your limbs are weak, you sleep poorly, and you're becoming thinner by the day." The king was delighted and said, "Every symptom matches exactly!" Wukong continued, "Your body sweats spontaneously, your mouth is bitter and tongue dry, and you're irritable." The king said, "Precisely! Precisely!"

Wukong went on, "Though you don't leave the palace, your heart wanders far. Though you lie in bed, your spirit roams. You keep thinking of some matter, causing this illness." The king said, "Divine Monk truly has supernatural insight! I do have something on my mind, but I dare not speak of it." Wukong said, "In treating illness, doctor and patient must be frank. If you hide your thoughts, how can the medicine work?" The king ordered all attendants to withdraw, leaving only the elderly eunuch holding the thread. He then said, "Divine Monk, I will tell you: Before falling ill, I dreamed one night of two suns in the sky. When I awoke, I felt unsettled. I consulted my ministers, but none could interpret the dream. From then on, I became ill. Even now, after three years, whenever I think of that dream, my heart races and my spirit is disturbed."

Hearing this, Wukong smiled inwardly, thinking, "So that's what it is. Now I can play with him." He said loudly, "Your Majesty, prepare paper and brush. I will write a prescription to cure your illness." The king ordered an attendant to prepare these items immediately. Wukong released the thread and wrote:

"The body houses the spirit, the spirit controls the body.  
When spirit and body separate, disaster follows.  
Two suns in one sky - an earth-shaking sight,  
A kingdom split in two brings chaos to all.  
Your thoughts dwell on this constantly,  
Leading to illness that defies all cures.  
If you wish to heal this deep-seated ailment,  
Share your throne with another ruler."

After writing this, he folded the paper and had it passed in through the window. The king read it and was shocked, saying, "Divine Monk, you truly have penetrating insight! This prescription exactly describes my condition. But what medicine should I take?" Wukong said, "No medicine is needed. If Your Majesty will promise me something, I guarantee your complete recovery within three days." The king said, "What do you want me to promise? Tell me, Divine Monk." Wukong said, "There's a sage monk sent by the Great Tang Emperor to fetch scriptures. He has already arrived at your court. If Your Majesty will share your kingdom with him and make him co-ruler, your illness will be cured."

The king said, "If sharing my kingdom will cure my illness, that's easier than taking medicine. I was just speaking with that sage monk - he is indeed an eminent person of noble character. But I wonder if he would accept?" Wukong said, "My master is the Tang Emperor's brother. He has an imperial decree to fetch scriptures. If Your Majesty sincerely wishes to share the throne, he might be willing to stay temporarily. But you must have your officials come to invite him properly."

The king immediately ordered all his civil and military officials to invite Tang Sanzang to the inner palace. When Tang Sanzang arrived, the king struggled to sit up and said, "If the Venerable Master will condescend to share our humble throne, this country will be fortunate indeed." Tang Sanzang was startled and quickly bowed, saying, "How dare I? I am just a humble monk." Wukong stepped forward and said, "Master, His Majesty speaks sincerely. Why refuse?" Tang Sanzang glared at him angrily.

Wukong addressed the officials, "Gentlemen, please listen. My master is a man of great virtue who has renounced the world. He's unwilling to accept worldly glory, but I know his mind well. Let me make a suggestion: have your king write an abdication edict, build a new palace, make a golden throne, and prepare a nine-level ceremonial platform. On an auspicious day, my master can ascend the throne. After he accepts the throne, His Majesty's illness will naturally be cured. This is called 'treating both the symptoms and the root cause.' What do you think?"

The officials discussed among themselves: "Although this monk looks ugly, his words make sense. Since ancient times, there have been cases of kingdoms having two rulers. The Duke of Zhou assisted the young King Cheng, and both were called rulers. We should follow this divine monk's suggestion." They reported their opinion to the king, who immediately ordered the royal architects to build a new palace and a nine-level platform, and had the royal scribes prepare the abdication edict.

Just then, from outside the palace came sounds of shouting and chaos. An official reported, "Your Majesty, bad news! The previous emperor's golden regalia has been stolen from the royal treasury!" The king asked, "What golden regalia?" The official replied, "A golden helmet, golden armor, a golden rod, and golden-toed boots - all four items are missing!" The king said, "These treasures have been stored in the palace for thirty years. How could they suddenly disappear today?" He ordered an immediate investigation.

Before the order was finished, another official rushed in to report: "Your Majesty, as the royal architects were measuring the ground to build the new palace, they discovered these four golden items buried in the earth!" The king ordered them brought in for inspection. Indeed, they were the missing golden helmet, armor, rod, and boots. The king looked them over and asked, "Where exactly were these found?" The official replied, "Under the roots of a pine tree in front of the Clear Coolness Palace."

The king sighed deeply and said, "How strange! These treasures have been stored in the depths of the palace treasury. Even if thieves had stolen them, how could they have buried them there? This must be some kind of demon's work!" Wukong stepped forward and said with a smile, "Your Majesty, it's not demon's work. These are actually imperial regalia from three previous generations. When Your Majesty dreamed of two suns, it was a sign from heaven. Today these treasures have emerged - another auspicious sign. Since ancient times, when precious objects appear, wise rulers emerge. Consider the Nine Tripods of the Xia Dynasty, or the Eight Trigrams emerging from the Yellow River. Here we have four treasures appearing - clearly heaven's will. These should be presented to my master."

The king said, "Divine Monk speaks truly. Indeed, we should offer these treasures to the Venerable Master." Tang Sanzang hastily declined, saying, "I cannot accept them! I cannot accept them!" Wukong said, "Master, why refuse? As the saying goes, 'If heaven bestows something, and you refuse it, you will suffer misfortune.' You should accept them. Let your disciple try them on first to see if they fit."

Without waiting for a response, he picked up the golden helmet and placed it on his head, donned the golden armor, grasped the golden rod, and put on the golden boots. Then he strutted around saying, "Master, they fit perfectly! They fit perfectly!" All the officials were alarmed, and Tang Sanzang was so ashamed he could hardly look up. The king, however, was quite pleased and said, "Since they fit so well, let him keep them."

Suddenly they heard drums and gongs from outside the palace, and someone reported: "The Prince has returned!" The king was delighted and said, "I had almost forgotten! Three days ago, I sent my son with thirty thousand troops to patrol our borders. They've returned quickly!" Before he finished speaking, a young man in full armor entered and kowtowed, saying, "Father King, your son has returned from patrol." The king asked about the border situation, and the Prince replied, "All is peaceful on all four borders. We encountered no enemies and had to turn back due to heavy rain."

Just then, the Prince noticed Wukong wearing the golden regalia and asked, "Father King, why is this monk wearing our royal treasures?" The king explained everything that had happened. The Prince became angry and said, "Father King, you've been deceived! This monk is clearly a deceiver. I know these treasures well - they're our family heirlooms passed down for three generations, always stored in the inner treasury. How could they suddenly appear under a pine tree? This monk must have somehow stolen them and buried them there, then invented this story about sharing the throne to confuse you. He's wearing our treasures and strutting around - this is clearly a plot to seize our kingdom! Even if you wish to share the throne, Father, you should share it with your own son. How could you give it to a monk? Please order his immediate execution to prevent future troubles!"

The king, hearing this, ordered the guards to seize Wukong. Wukong smiled and said, "Young prince, don't be angry. Let me tell you something: These treasures were not buried by me - they appeared by themselves. Moreover, your kingdom originally belonged to me." The Prince asked, "When did our kingdom belong to you? What evidence do you have?" Wukong replied, "I'll show you the evidence. But first, tell me - how long has your family ruled this kingdom?"

The Prince said, "Our family has ruled this kingdom for three generations, spanning over a hundred years. Where were you then?" Wukong laughed and said, "You don't know that I am the True King of the Land of Zhumu!" The Prince became even angrier and shouted, "Seize this lying monk!" Several royal guards rushed forward with spears and swords.

Wukong, seeing them approach, pulled out a hair and transformed it into a copy of himself, complete with the golden regalia, while his true self leaped into the air. The officials and the king were astounded. Only Tang Sanzang understood what was happening and silently recited the Band-Tightening Spell. Wukong, feeling the headache coming on, quickly said, "Master, don't recite it! I'm going to reveal my true identity!"

He pulled out his iron rod and pointed it at the Prince, saying, "Look carefully, foolish child! I am your father!" As he spoke, he resumed his original form as the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, causing everyone in the palace to fall to their knees in terror. Only then did the Prince remember and said, "Now I recall! Before I was born, my mother told me that one night she dreamed of a golden-armored god entering her room. After that dream, she became pregnant with me. When I was born, I had a birthmark shaped like a golden helmet on my left arm. Could it be that this divine monk is really my father?"

The king also remembered and said, "Yes! Before this prince was born, I dreamed of two suns in the sky. That very night, the queen told me about her dream of the golden-armored god. These treasures must have some connection to all this!" He hurriedly asked Wukong to come down, but Wukong remained in the air and said:

"I am the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, Sun Wukong. Five hundred years ago, I caused havoc in heaven and was punished by the Buddha, trapped under the Mountain of Five Elements. I was later rescued by the Bodhisattva Guanyin and ordered to protect the Tang Monk on his journey to fetch scriptures. That night long ago, I was passing through here on my cloud when I saw these treasures glowing. I took them briefly to play with, not knowing the queen would dream of me. Now that I've met my son, I've revealed the truth. Take back your treasures - I don't need them. Just cure your illness and let us continue our journey west!"

With these words, he removed the golden regalia and dropped them down. The Prince caught them and kowtowed, saying, "Father, please come down and let me honor you properly." Wukong said, "Good child, no need for ceremony. I'm now a Buddhist monk - you should honor your present father. I must continue westward to attain the true fruit. We'll meet again someday." With that, he descended next to Tang Sanzang.

The king's illness was instantly cured. He stood up unaided and came down from his dragon bed to thank Wukong, saying, "Divine Monk, you've not only cured our illness but also revealed this wonderful truth. Please stay a few days so we can honor you properly." Wukong replied, "Your Majesty is very kind, but we monks prefer to travel light and fast. We've already delayed here too long."

The king would not take no for an answer and ordered a grand feast prepared in the palace. He invited Tang Sanzang to sit in the place of honor, with Wukong beside him, while he and the Prince sat on the sides. Civil and military officials stood in attendance. The king ordered the royal band to play and had rare delicacies served. Fragrant wines and pure teas filled the cups, while exotic fruits and vegetables covered the tables.

Bajie and Sha Monk, still waiting at the guest house, wondered why their master and elder brother hadn't returned. Bajie said, "Sha Monk, stay here with the luggage. I'll go see what's happening." He went to the palace gate where the guards, recognizing him as Wukong's companion, let him enter. Seeing the grand feast, his mouth watered. Wukong spotted him and said, "Your Majesty, my stupid brother has arrived." The king promptly ordered another place set for him.

Bajie came forward and said, "Brother, you went to play doctor but ended up attending a feast. Why didn't you call me earlier?" Wukong said, "We were busy with official matters. Now that you're here, enjoy yourself!" The idiot didn't need a second invitation - he sat down and began eating and drinking heartily.

After the feast, Tang Sanzang insisted on leaving. The king ordered the royal treasury opened and had gold and silver brought out on trays. He presented thirty ingots of gold and silver each to Tang Sanzang, saying, "Please accept this small token for your journey." Tang Sanzang firmly declined, saying, "We monks who have left home do not accept gold or silver. Please keep your treasures." The king then had silk garments brought out, but Tang Sanzang declined these as well, saying, "We only wear plain cotton robes."

The king said, "Venerable Master, you refuse all our gifts. What can we offer to show our gratitude?" Wukong spoke up, "We're traveling west and will need food along the way. If Your Majesty could provide us with some dried goods that are easy to carry, that would be very helpful." The king was delighted and ordered the royal kitchens to prepare preserved fruits, dried meats, pastries, and other travel-suitable foods. He also had some fresh fruit brought out.

As they were preparing to leave, the Prince came forward and kowtowed to Wukong again, saying, "Father, since you won't stay, please leave me something as a memento." Wukong plucked a hair, blew on it, and transformed it into a small golden cudgel, exactly like his own but only one foot long. He gave it to the Prince saying, "This treasure can protect you from harm. Keep it well, but don't show it to others casually. When you think of me, burn incense and it will glow in response." The Prince accepted it with great joy and kowtowed again.

The king, queen, prince, officials, and all the palace staff came out to bid them farewell. Tang Sanzang mounted his horse while Bajie and Sha Monk carried the luggage. As they departed through the city gates, thousands of people lined the streets to see them off, burning incense and saying, "The living Buddha has passed through our land!" After traveling several miles, Wukong used his cloud-clearing spell to disperse the crowd and send them home.

As they resumed their journey west, Tang Sanzang asked from his horse, "Wukong, since entering this kingdom, I've noticed how rude and unreasonable you've been. You took down their proclamation, falsely claimed to know medicine, scared the king into a faint, insisted on sharing the throne, and wore their royal treasures. I was deeply worried. But then you revealed your true identity, which turned out to be genuine. Tell me honestly - how did you know about all this beforehand?"

Wukong smiled and said, "Master, you don't understand. That night long ago when I was still causing havoc in heaven, I was indeed wandering here on my cloud. Seeing the golden light from their treasury, I went down to play with those treasures for a while, not realizing the queen would dream of me that night. But once I saw those treasures today, I remembered everything clearly. That's why I dared to claim them and reveal my true identity. It wasn't something I planned in advance."

Tang Sanzang said, "Even so, you've caused quite a commotion in their kingdom." Wukong replied, "What commotion? I've brought them great fortune! Before, they had a sick ruler, but now their king is healthy. They also learned that their prince has a noble father - none other than old Sun himself! Their kingdom will prosper for generations to come." Everyone laughed at this, and they continued their journey with light hearts.

As the saying goes:  
Having cleared up past karma from previous lives,  
They continued forward on their destined path.

If you wish to know what happens next on their journey, please listen to the explanation in the next chapter.