**THE SPIDER’S THREAD**

The Buddha Shakyamuni is meandering around Paradise one morning, when he stops at a lotus-filled pond. Between the lilies, he can see, through the crystal-clear waters, the depths of Hell. His eyes come to rest on one sinner in particular, by the name of Kandata. Kandata was a cold-hearted criminal, but had one good deed to his name: while walking through the forest one day, he decided not to kill a spider he was about to crush with his foot. Moved by this single act of compassion, the Buddha takes the silvery thread of a spider in Paradise and lowers it down into Hell.

Down in Hell, the myriad sinners are struggling in the Pool of Blood, in total darkness save for the light glinting off the Mountain of Spikes, and in total silence save for the sighs of the damned. Kandata, looking up by chance at the sky above the pool, sees the spider's thread descending towards him and grabs hold with all the might of a seasoned criminal. The climb from Hell to Paradise is not a short one, however, and Kandata quickly tires. Dangling from the middle of the rope, he glances downward, and sees how far he has come. Realizing that he may actually escape from Hell, he is overcome by joy and laughs giddily. His elation is short-lived, however, as he realizes that others have started climbing the thread behind him, stretching down into the murky depths below. Fearing that the thread will break from the weight of the others, he shouts that the spider's thread is his and his alone. It is at this moment that the thread breaks, and he and all the other sinners are cast back down into the Pool of Blood.

Shakyamuni witnesses this, knowing all but still with a slightly sad air. In the end, Kandata condemned himself by being concerned only with his own salvation and not that of others. But Paradise continues on as it has, and it is nearly noontime there. Thus the Buddha continues his meanderings.

**THE TWO BROTHERS**

A rich goldsmith and a poor broommaker were brothers. The broommaker had two identical twin sons. One day, the broommaker saw a golden bird in the woods, knocked off a feather, and sold it to his brother for a great sum. He pursued the bird again and found a golden egg. A third time, he brought back the bird itself, and his brother, who knew its powers — that whoever ate its heart and liver would find a gold coin beneath his pillow every night — had his wife cook it. But his nephews came to the kitchen to beg, and when two bits fell from the bird, they ate them, and the gold coins appeared beneath their pillows.

The goldsmith told his brother that his sons were in league with the devil, and persuaded him to abandon them. A huntsman took them in and taught them his trade. Once they were grown, they begged his permission to seek their fortune. He was pleased, because they talked like brave huntsmen, and let them go, giving them a knife with directions that if they ever parted, they should stick it into a tree, and when one returned, he could see how his brother fared, because the blade's side would rust if it went ill with him.

On the way, they nearly shot a hare for hunger, but it begged for its life, offering to give them two young hares instead, so they let it go. The same happened with a fox, a wolf, a bear, and a lion. The young animals showed them a village where they could buy food. They parted ways, each one taking half the animals, and drove a knife into a tree where they parted.

The younger came to a town all hung in black, where a dragon had eaten every young maiden except the [princess](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_and_dragon), who was to be given to it the next day. The huntsman climbed the dragon's hill and found three cups and a sword. He was unable to wield the sword until he had drunk from the cups.

The next morning, the princess was brought to the hill, and the king's marshal watched. The seven-headed dragon came and breathed fire, setting all the grass ablaze, but the animals trampled the flames out. The huntsman cut off six of its heads and its tail and had the animals tear it to bits. The princess distributed her necklace among the animals, and gave the huntsman her knife, with which he cut off the dragon's tongues. He was exhausted and told the lion to keep watch while he slept, but the lion was also exhausted, and told the bear to keep watch, and so on down to the hare, who had no one to tell to keep watch. The [marshal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_hero) cut off the huntsman's head and forced the princess to promise to say that he had rescued her.

The animals woke and would have killed the hare, but it said it knew of a root that would restore the huntsman, so they let it fetch it. The huntsman thought the princess must have killed him, to be rid of him, and wandered the world. A year later, he came back to the town and found it hung in red for the princess's wedding to the marshal. The huntsman bet with the innkeeper that he could get bread from the king's table, and sent the hare. The princess recognized it by the part of her necklace, and sent a loaf with it. The innkeeper would bet no more, but he sent the fox, wolf, bear, and lion for meat, vegetables, confectionery, and wine.

The king wondered at the animals, and the princess told him to send for their master. When he arrived at the castle, the seven dragon's heads were displayed, and the huntsman opened their mouth and asked where their tongues were. He produced the tongues, and the princess confirmed his story. The marshal was executed, and the huntsman and princess married.

One day, he hunted a white stag and ended up alone in the woods. An old woman begged to come near the fire, and asked him to strike his animals with a wand so they would not harm her. This turned them to stone, and so she was able to turn him to stone.

His brother found the knife all rusted on one side, and went in search of his brother. He was welcomed as the young king in the town, but put a sword in the bed between him and the princess. Hearing what his brother had been doing, he set out to the same woods and found the same witch, but refused to strike his animals. When he shot his gun at her, she was proof to lead, but he tore off three silver buttons and shot her. He made her restore his brother, his brother's animals, and many others.

The brothers went home, telling their tales. On hearing that his brother had been accepted as him and slept in his bed, the young king cut off his head, but repented of it. The hare brought the root again, and the brother was restored. They returned to the town, and the princess could recognize her husband by the necklace on his animals, and asked him why he had put the sword in the bed those night, revealing to him that his brother had been true.

**The Gentleman of the Jungle (A Gikuyu Tale)**

Once upon a time an elephant made a friendship with a man. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out, the elephant went to his friend, who had a little hut at the edge of the forest, and said to him: 'My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this torrential rain?' The man, seeing what situation his friend was in, replied: 'My dear good elephant, my hut is very small, but there is room for your trunk and myself. Please put your trunk in gently.' The elephant thanked his friend, saying: 'You have done me a good deed and one day I shall return your kindness.' But what followed? As soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain, and then lay down comfortably inside his friend's hut, saying: 'My dear good friend, your skin is harder than mine, and as there is not enough room for both of us, you can afford to remain in the rain while I am protecting my delicate skin from the hailstorm.'

The man, seeing what his friend had done to him, started to grumble; the animals in the nearby forest heard the noise and came to see what was the matter. All stood around listening to the heated argument between the man and his friend the elephant. In this turmoil the lion came along roaring, and said in a loud voice: 'Don't you all know that I am the King of the Jungle! How dare any one disturb the peace of my kingdom?' On hearing this the elephant, who was one of the high ministers in the jungle kingdom, replied in a soothing voice, and said: 'My lord, there is no disturbance of the peace in your kingdom. I have only been having a little discussion with my friend here as to the possession of this little hut which your lordship sees me occupying.' The lion, who wanted to have 'peace and tranquility' in his kingdom, replied in a noble voice, saying: 'I command my ministers to appoint a Commission of Enquiry to go thoroughly into this matter and report accordingly.' He then turned to the man and said: 'You have done well by establishing friendship with my people, especially with the elephant, who is one of my honourable ministers of state. Do not grumble any more, your hut is not lost to you. Wait until the sitting of my Imperial Commission, and there you will be given plenty of opportunity to state your case. I am sure that you will be pleased with the findings of the Commission.' The man was very pleased by these sweet words from the King of the Jungle, and innocently waited for his opportunity, in the belief that naturally the hut would be returned to him.

The elephant, obeying the command of his master, got busy with other ministers to appoint the Commission of Enquiry. The following elders of the jungle were appointed to sit in the Commission: (1) Mr Rhinoceros; (2) Mr Buffalo; (3) Mr Alligator; (4) The Rt Hon. Mr Fox to act as chairman; and (5) Mr Leopard to act as Secretary to the Commission. On seeing the personnel, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this Commission a member from his side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the intricacy of jungle law. Further, that there was nothing to fear, for the members of the Commission were all men of repute for their impartiality in justice, and as they were gentlemen chosen by God to look after the interests of races less adequately endowed with teeth and claws, he might rest assured that they would investigate the matter with the greatest care and report impartially.

The Commission sat to take the evidence. The Rt Hon. Mr Elephant was first called. He came along with a superior air, brushing his tusks with a sapling which Mrs Elephant had provided, and in an authoritative voice said: 'Gentlemen of the Jungle, there is no need for me to waste your valuable time in relating a story which I am sure you all know. I have always regarded it as my duty to protect the interests of my friends, and this appears to have caused the misunderstanding between myself and my friend here. He invited me to save his hut from being blown away by a hurricane. As the hurricane had gained access owing to the unoccupied space in the hut, I considered it necessary, in my friend's own interests, to turn the undeveloped space to a more economic use by sitting in it myself; a duty which any of you would undoubtedly have performed with equal readiness in similar circumstances.'

After hearing the Rt Hon. Mr Elephant's conclusive evidence, the Commission called Mr Hyena and other elders of the jungle, who all supported what Mr Elephant had said. They then called the man, who began to give his own account of the dispute. But the Commission cut him short, saying: 'My good man, please confine yourself to relevant issues. We have already heard the circumstances from various unbiased sources; all we wish you to tell us is whether the undeveloped space in your hut was occupied by any one else before Mr Elephant assumed his position?' The man began to say: 'No, but-' But at this point the Commission declared that they had heard sufficient evidence from both sides and retired to consider their decision. After enjoying a delicious meal at the expense of the Rt Hon. Mr Elephant, they reached their verdict, called the man, and declared as follows: 'In our opinion this dispute has arisen through a regrettable misunderstanding due to the backwardness of your ideas. We consider that Mr Elephant has fulfilled his sacred duty of protecting your interests. As it is clearly for your good that the space should be put to its most economic use, and as you yourself have not reached the stage of expansion which would enable you to fill it, we consider it necessary to arrange a compromise to suit both parties. Mr Elephant shall continue his occupation of your hut, but we give you permission to look for a site where you can build another hut more suited to your needs, and we will see that you are well protected.'

The man, having no alternative, and fearing that his refusal might expose him to the teeth and claws of members of the Commission, did as they suggested. But no sooner had he built another hut than Mr Rhinoceros charged in with his horn lowered and ordered the man to quit. A Royal Commission was again appointed to look into the matter, and the same finding was given. This procedure was repeated until Mr Buffalo, Mr Leopard, Mr Hyena and the rest were all accommodated with new huts. Then the man decided that he must adopt an effective method of protection, since Commissions of Enquiry did not seem to be of any use to him. He sat down and said, 'Ng'enda thi ndagaga motegi,' which literally means 'there is nothing that treads on the earth that cannot be trapped,' or in other words, you can fool people for a time, but not for ever.

Early one morning, when the huts already occupied by the jungle lords were all beginning to decay and fall to pieces, he went out and built a bigger and better hut a little distance away. No sooner had Mr Rhinoceros seen it than he came rushing in, only to find that Mr Elephant was already inside, sound asleep. Mr Leopard next came to the window, Mr Lion, Mr Fox and Mr Buffalo entered the doors, while Mr Hyena howled for a place in the shade and Mr Alligator basked on the roof. Presently they all began disputing about their rights of penetration, and from disputing they came to fighting, and while they were all embroiled together the man set the hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, jungle lords and all. Then he went home, saying: 'Peace is costly, but it's worth the expense,' and lived happily ever after.

**THE STORY OF RUTH**

A famine has destroyed the farm of Elimelech of Bethlehem, driving him and his wife Naomi to the land of Moab. There, with the help of their two sons, they do well for a time, and the sons marry Gentile women of the region, Orpah, and the good and beautiful Ruth. But tragedy strikes the family once again. Within a short period of time, Elimelech and his two sons die. The three women are left widowed and alone. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. Knowing that Gentiles would not be welcome there, she tells Orpah and Ruth to return to their families. Orpah does so, but the faithful Ruth makes a vow to Naomi to never desert her. "Whither thy guest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Naomi thanks God for blessing her with a loving daughter-in-law, and asks Him to protect and bless Ruth. God listens to the prayers of Naomi. In Bethlehem, Ruth tells Naomi that she will find food for them. She goes to a field which is being harvested, and asks permission to gather the bits of grain left behind by the harvesters. The land belongs to Boaz, who welcomes her to take what she needs. The kindly Boaz instructs his men to protect Ruth from any persecution. She is to be treated well in her new home. Day after Day Ruth returns to Boaz's land, and we see the growing affection between Ruth and Boaz. Naomi tells Ruth that because Boaz is her near kinsman he is bound to marry the widowed Ruth, and urges Ruth to reveal her kinship. But Ruth wants Boaz to marry her out of love, not because of duty. On the last day of the harvest, Ruth and Boaz finally speak of their love and agree to marry. Once married, Ruth gives birth to a son, whom they name Obed. As a result of Ruth's faithfulness, God's bounty and blessing on the family are limitless. Obed is destined to be the grandfather of David, the great King who is to unite the people of Israel.

**CREATING THE EARTH (A YORUBA TALE)**

The entire world was filled with water when God decided to create the world. God sent his messenger Obatala to perform the task of creating the world. Obatala brought along his helper, a man named Oduduwa as well as a calabash full of earth and a chicken. Then they began their descent to earth from a rope.

Along the way, they stopped over at a feast where Obatala got drunk from drinking too much palm wine. Oduduwa, finding his master drunk, picked up the calabash and the chicken and continued on the journey.

When Oduduwa reached the earth, he sprinkled earth from the calabash over the water and he dropped the chicken on the earth. The chicken then ran around spreading the earth in every direction he moved until there was land. Oduduwa had now created earth from what used to be water.

Later when Obatala got out of his drunken haze, he discovered that Oduduwa had already performed his task and he was very upset. God however gave him another task to perform – to create the people that would populate the earth.

And that was how the world was created in a place now called Ile-Ife.

**THE CHINESE CINDERELLA**

During the time of the Ch’in and Han dynasties, a cave chief named Wu married two wives and each gave birth to baby girls. Before long Chief Wu and one wife died leaving one baby, Yeh-Shen, to be reared by her stepmother. The stepmother didn’t like Yeh-Shen for she was more beautiful and kinder than her own daughter so she treated her poorly.

Yeh-Shen was given the worst jobs and the only friend she had was a beautiful fish with big golden eyes . Each day the fish came out of the water onto the bank to be fed by Yeh-Shen. Now Yen-Shen had little food for herself but she was willing to share with the fish. Her stepmother hearing about the fish disguised herself as Yen-Shen and enticed the fish from the water. She stabbed it with a dagger, and cooked the fish for dinner.

Yeh-Shen was distraught when she learned of the fish’s death. As she sat crying she heard a voice and looked up to see a wise old man wearing the coarsest of clothes and with hair hanging down over his shoulders. He told her that the bones of the fish were filled with a powerful spirit, and that when she was in serious need she was to kneel before the bones and tell them of her heart’s desires. She was warned not to waste their gifts.

Yeh-Shen retrieved the bones from the trash heap and hid them in a safe place. Time passed and the spring festival was nearing. This was a time when the young people gathered in the village to meet one another and to find husbands and wives. Yen-Shen longed to go to the festival but her stepmother wouldn’t allow it because she feared that someone would pick Yeh-Shen rather than her own daughter.

The stepmother and the daughter left for the festival leaving Yeh-Shen behind. Yeh-Shen wanting desperately to go asked the bones for clothes to wear to the festival. Suddenly she was wearing a beautiful gown of azure blue with a cloak of kingfisher feathers draped around her shoulders. On her feet were beautiful slippers. They were woven of golden threads in a pattern of a scaled fish and the soles were made of solid gold. When she walked she felt lighter than air. She was warned not to lose the slippers.

Yeh-Shen arrived at the festival and soon all were looking her way. The daughter and step-mother moved closer to her for they seemed to recognize this beautiful person. Seeing that she would be found out, Yeh-Shen dashed out of the village leaving behind one of the golden slippers.

When she arrived home she was dressed again in her rags. She spoke again to the bones, but they were now silent. Saddened she put the one golden slipper in her bedstraw. After a time a merchant found the lost slipper, and seeing the value in the golden slipper sold it to a merchant who gave it to the king of the island kingdom of T’o Han.

Now the king wanted to find the owner of this tiny beautiful slipper. He sent his people to search the kingdom but no ones foot would fit in the tiny golden slipper. He had the slipper placed on display in a pavilion on the side of the road where the slipper had been found with an announcement that the shoe was to be returned to the owner.

The king’s men waited out of site. All the women came to try on the shoe. One dark night Yeh-Shen slipped quietly across the pavilion, took the tiny golden slipper and turned to leave, but the king’s men rushed out and arrested her. She was taken to the king who was furious for he couldn’t believe that any one in rags could possibly own a golden slipper. As he looked closer at her face he was struck by her beauty and he noticed she had the tiniest feet.

The king and his men returned home with her where she produced the other slipper. As she slipped on the two slippers her rags turned into the beautiful gown and cloak she had worn to the festival. The king realized that she was the one for him. They married and lived happily ever after. However, the stepmother and daughter were never allowed to visit Yeh-Shen and were forced to continue to live in their cave until the day they were crushed to death in a shower of flying stones.

**THE MAN AND THE MONKEYS**

ONCE upon a time when the garden of Eden was in the world, a man traveling around the country found the garden and went in through the gateway. He thought it a very beautiful place. There was everything good to eat, cakes and candies and fruits of all kinds. He said to himself, "Here I'll stay. I won't have to work any more, for everything I need is here, so here I'll remain." He thought he would take a nap, and crawled up one of the big trees and went to sleep among the branches. But he slept too soundly and forgot he was up the tree, and went to turn over and tumbled into a lake. One of the monkeys in the forest saw him fall into the water and tried in every way to help him out, and finally said, "I'm too little. I can't pull you out, but if I can grow big and strong I'll be able to help you out." So he began to exercise every day by picking up small stones, and then every day a little larger one, until finally he grew strong enough to lift a big stone, and so was able to get the man out of the water. After the man was rescued he didn't feel very well and the monkey proposed that he exercise a while with the stones. He threw the stones about a while until he felt quite warm, then thought he'd go to sleep again, but this time he'd lie down on the ground. The monkeys were all in the trees talking and chattering, so he didn't sleep very soundly. When he roused up he thought, "This is a beautiful place if there just wasn't so many monkeys." (I guess he forgot how much one of them had just helped him.) "If these monkeys would all die, I'd go home and get my family and stay here, because we wouldn't have to work at all."

By this time it was evening and the monkeys were all asleep in the trees. So he shook all the trees until the monkeys fell out on the ground and were killed by the fall. Then, quite well satisfied with himself, he started home to bring his family back to the garden to live. But on the way the monkey god, who looks after monkeys, good and bad, and knew the man had been mean to the monkeys when they had been kind to him, turned himself into a big snake, met him on the path and swallowed him.

**THE CRICKET BOY**

A long time ago, cricket fighting caught on in the imperial court, with the emperor leading the fad. A local magistrate in Huayin, who wanted to win the favor of the monarch, tried in every way to get him the best fighting crickets. He had a strategy for doing so: He managed to get a cricket that was very good at fighting. He then made his subordinates go to the heads of each village and force them to send in a constant supply of fighting crickets. He would send to the imperial court the crickets that could beat the one he was keeping. Theoretically, everything should have worked smoothly. However, as the magistrate was extremely zealous to please the emperor, he meted out harsh punishment on any village heads who failed to accomplish their tasks. The village heads in turn shifted the burden to the poor villagers, who had to search for the crickets. If they failed to catch them, they had to purchase them from someone else, or they had to pay a levy in cash. The small insects suddenly became a rare commodity. Speculators hoarded good crickets, buying them at a bargain and selling them for an exorbitant price. Many village heads worked hand in hand with the speculators to make profits. In so doing, they bankrupted many a family. Cheng Ming was one such villager. The head of his village delegated part of his duties to him because he found Cheng Ming easy to push around. Cheng Ming did not want to bully his fellow villagers as the village head did him, so he often had to pay cash out of his own pocket when he failed to collect any competent crickets. Soon the little proper ties he had were draining away, and he went into a severe depression. One day, he said to his wife that he wanted to die.“Death is easy, but what will our son do without you?” asked his wife, glancing at their only son, sleeping on the kang. “Why can’t we look for the crickets ourselves instead of buying them? Perhaps we’ll strike some good luck.”Cheng Ming gave up the idea of suicide and went to search for crickets. Armed with a tiny basket of copper wires for catching crickets and a number of small bamboo tubes for holding them, he went about the tedious task. Each day he got up at dawn and did not return until late in the evening. He searched beneath brick debris, dike crevices, and in the weeds and bushes. Days went by, and he caught only a few mediocre crickets that did not measure up to the magistrate’s standards. His worries increased as the dead line drew closer and closer. The day for cricket delivery finally came, but Cheng Ming could not produce any good ones. He was clubbed a hundred times on the buttocks, a form of corporal punishment in the ancient Chinese judicial system. When he was released the next day, he could barely walk. The wound on his buttocks confined him to bed for days and further delayed his search for crickets. He thought of committing suicide again. His wife did not know what to do then they heard about a hunchbacked fortune teller who was visiting the village. Cheng Ming’s wife went to see him. The fortune teller gave her apiece of paper with a picture on it. It was a pavilion with a jiashan (rockgarden) behind it. On the bushes by the jiashan sat a fat male cricket. Beside it, however, lurked a large toad, ready to catch the insect with its long, elastic tongue. When the wife got home, she showed the paper to her husband. Cheng Ming sprang up and jumped to the floor, forgetting the pain in his buttocks.“This is the fortune teller’s hint at the location where I can find a perfect cricket to accomplish my task!” he exclaimed.“But we don’t have a pavilion in our village,” his wife re minded him.“Well, take a closer look and think. Doesn’t the temple on the east side of our village have a rock garden? That must be it.” So saying, Cheng Ming limped to the temple with the support of a make shift crutch. Sure enough, he saw the cricket, and the toad squatting nearby in the rock garden at the back of the temple. He caught the big, black male cricket just before the toad got hold of it. Back home, he carefully placed the cricket in a jar he had prepared for it and stowed the jar away in a safe place. “Everything will be over tomorrow,” he gave a sigh of relief and went to tell his best friends in the village the good news. Cheng Ming’s nine-year-old son was very curious. Seeing his father was gone, he took the jar and wanted to have a peek at the cricket. He was removing the lid carefully, when the big cricket jumped out and hopped away. Panicked, the boy tried to catch the fleeing cricket with his hands, but in a flurry, he accidentally squashed the insect when he finally got hold of it.“Good heavens! What’re you going to say to your father when he comes back?” the mother said in distress and dread. Without a word, the boy went out of the room, tears in his eyes. Cheng Ming became distraught when he saw the dead cricket. He couldn’t believe that all his hopes had been dashed in a second. He looked around for his son, vowing to teach the little scoundrel a good lesson. He searched inside and outside the house, only to locate him in a well at the corner of the court yard. When he fished him out, the boy was already dead. The father’s fury instantly gave way to sorrow. The grieved parents laid their son on the kang and lamented over his body the entire night. As Cheng Ming was dressing his son for burial the next morning, he felt the body still warm. Immediately he put the boy back on the kang, hoping that he would revive. Gradually the boy came back to life, but to his parents’ dismay, he was unconscious, as if he were in a trance. The parents grieved again for the loss of their son. Suddenly they heard a cricket chirping. The couple traced the sound to a small cricket on the door step. The appearance of the cricket, however, dashed their hopes, f or it was very small. “Well, it’s better than nothing,” Cheng Ming thought. He was about to catch it, when it jumped nimbly on to a wall, cheeping at him. He tip toed to ward it, but it showed no sign of fleeing. Instead, when Cheng Ming came a few steps closer, the little cricket jumped onto his chest. Though small, the cricket looked smart and energetic. Cheng Ming planned to take it to the village head. Uncertain of its capabilities, Cheng Ming could not go to sleep. He wanted to put the little cricket to the test before sending it to the village head. The next morning, Cheng Ming went to a young man from a rich family in his neighborhood, having heard him boasting about an “invincible” cricket that he wanted to sell for a high price. When the young man showed his cricket, Cheng Ming hesitated, because his little cricket seemed no match for this gigantic insect. To fight this monster would be to condemn his dwarf to death.“There’s no way my little cricket could survive a confrontation with your big guy,” Cheng Ming said to the young man, holding his jar tight. The young man goaded and taunted him. At last, Cheng Ming decided to take a risk. “Well, it won’t hurt to give a try. If the little cricket is a good-for-nothing, what’s the use of keeping it anyway?” he thought. When they put the two crickets together in a jar, Cheng Ming’s small insect seemed transfixed. No matter how the young man prodded it to fight, it simply would not budge. The young man burst into a guffaw, to the great embarrassment of Cheng Ming. As the young man spurred the little cricket on, it suddenly seemed to have run out of patience. With great wrath, it charged the giant opponent head on. The sudden burst of action stunned both the young man and Cheng Ming. Before the little creature planted its small but sharp teeth into the neck of the big cricket, the terrified young man fished the big insect out of the jar just in time and called off the contest. The little cricket chirped victoriously, and Cheng Ming felt exceedingly happy and proud. Cheng Ming and the young man were commenting on the little cricket’s extraordinary prowess, when a big rooster rushed over to peck at the little cricket in the jar. The little cricket hopped out of the jar in time to dodge the attack. The rooster then went for it a second time, but suddenly began to shake its head violently, screaming in agony. This sudden turn of events baffled Cheng Ming and the onlookers. When they took a closer look, they could not believe their eyes: The little cricket was gnawing on the rooster’s bloody comb. The story of a cricket fighting a rooster soon spread throughout the village and beyond. The next day, Cheng Ming, along with the village head, sent the cricket to the magistrate and asked for a test fight with his master cricket, but the magistrate re fused on the ground that Cheng Ming’s cricket was too small.“I don’t think you have heard its rooster-fighting story,” Cheng Ming proclaimed with great pride. “You can’t judge it only by its appearance.”“Nonsense, how can a cricket fight a rooster?” asked the magistrate. He ordered a big rooster brought to his office, thinking that Cheng Ming would quit telling his tall tales when his cricket became the bird’s snack. The battle between the little cricket and the rooster ended with the same result: The rooster sped away in great pain, the little cricket chirping triumphantly on its heels.

The magistrate was first astonished and then pleased, thinking that he finally had the very insect that could win him the emperor’s favor. He had a golden cage manufactured for the little cricket. Placing it cautiously in the cage, he took it to the emperor. The emperor pitted the little cricket against all his veteran combat ant crickets, and it defeated them one by one. What amused the emperor most was that the little creature could even dance to the tune of his court music! Extremely pleased with the magic little creature, the emperor rewarded the magistrate liberally and promoted him to a higher position. The magistrate, now a governor, in turn exempted Cheng Ming from his levies in cash as well as crickets. A year later, Cheng Ming’s son came out of his stupor. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, to the great surprise and joy of his parents. The first word she uttered to his jubilant parents were, “I’m so tired and hungry.” After a hot meal, he told them, “I dreamed that I had become a cricket, and I fought a lot of other crickets. It was such fun! You know what? The greatest fun I had was my fight with a couple of roosters!”