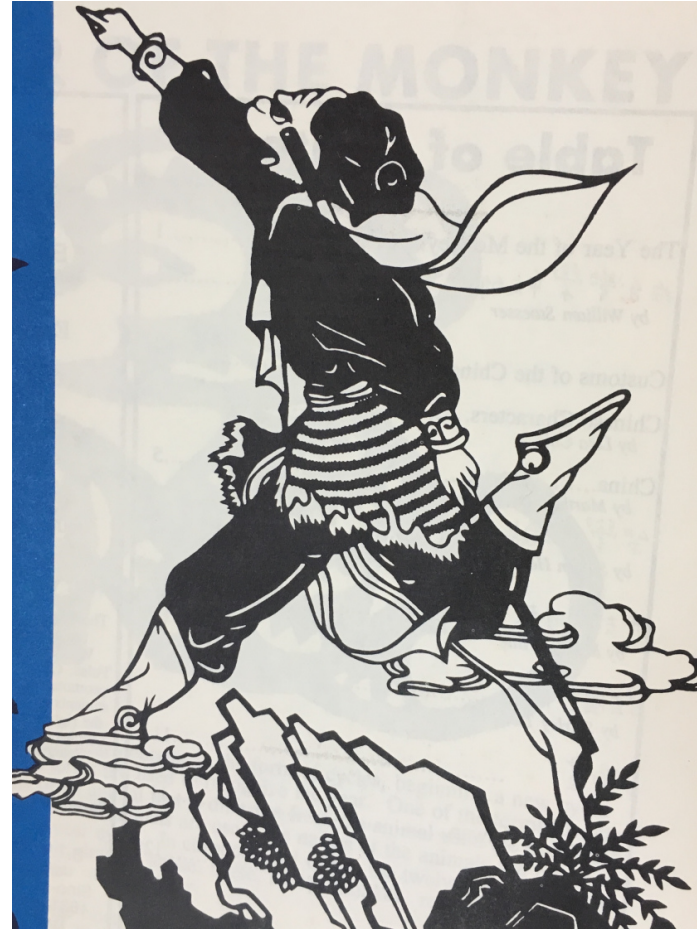


五十二

A monkey, a pig
and a priest on a quest
set out on a journey
which took them out west
their harrowing stories
are known far and wide
Tang Seng, Zhu Ba Jie
Sun Wu Kong was their guide



Chapter 52 – Monkey King vs. the White-Boned Demon – 3 Strikes and you’re out!

After Sun Wu Kong, the Monkey King was imprisoned under Five Elements Mountain (五行山 Wǔháng shān) for 500 years, he was finally released on the condition that he and his piggy friend, 豬八戒 Zhū Bājiè, help the monk, Tripitaka (三藏經 Sāncángjīng), aka 唐三藏 Táng sāncáng, aka 唐僧 Táng Sēng aka 唐甄 Táng Zhēn, transport the Buddhist scriptures from India to China. This ancient trio of superheroes was joined by another monk called 沙僧 Shā Sēng aka 沙悟淨 Shā Wùjìng, and Tang Seng’s faithful white steed, 白龍馬 Báilóngmǎ. The following is one of the best known stories from the monkey king’s “Journey to the West” (西游记 Xīyóu jì.)

“Sun Wu Kong and the 3 hits of the White-Boned Demon” (三打白骨精 Sān Dǎ Bái Gǔ Jīng)

白骨精 Bái Gǔ Jīng (the White-Boned Demon) hunkered down and licked her lips when Tang Seng passed by. She knew that if she tasted the flesh of Tang Seng, she would live forever.

In the White Tiger Mountain Range, there lived a young peasant girl who ploughed the fields with her mother and father. Unseen by the innocent young girl and her family, Bai Gu Jing flew down and put deadly poison into their drinking water. The young girl took a ladle, and after first serving her parents, she then drank a ladle full of water herself. Within minutes, the entire family lay dead. Bai Gu Jing cackled softly as she moved the bodies to a safe place where they wouldn’t be found.

Soon after, Tang Seng and his followers walked into the clearing. Sun Wu Kong’s skin began to tingle and he knew he was in the presence of pure evil. “Master,” Sun Wu Kong addressed Tang Seng, “Nearby there are many beings who would like nothing better than a taste of your flesh.” With his magic staff, Monkey drew a perfect circle around his friends and warned them. “Nothing can harm you within the confines of this magic ring. Stay inside while I search for food and water. If you step outside of the circle, you put yourself in great peril.”

As was his norm, Zhu Ba Jie felt his piggy tummy rumbling and soon began to complain. “Where is that lazy monkey? I’m famished!” Unbeknownst to Zhu Ba Jie and the rest of the group, the White Boned Demon (白骨精 Bái Gǔ Jīng) had moved her spirit into the body of the young girl and walked on a path towards Tang Seng and Zhu Ba Jie.

“Handsome sir”, the young girl addressed the pig. “Master” she bowed to Tang Seng. “It’s so nice to welcome you to our home.” The White Boned Demon (disguised as the young girl) moved toward them and was surprised when she could not step into the invisible barrier which protected them.

“Where are you going with that delicious looking basket of food?” asked Piggy.

“I’m taking it to my elderly parents, but I would be happy to share it with you” the girl responded. She spread a small cloth on the ground outside of the circle and carefully displayed the food.

“Oh, yes” cried Piggy. “We would love some.” Zhu Ba Jie jumped out of the magic circle and lumbered towards the feast. Bai Gu Jin could barely refrain herself from devouring the pig, but she knew the real prize was the monk.

Hunger finally got the best of Tang Seng, as the sun was setting. As soon as Tang Seng stepped out of the circle, Bai Gu Jing made her move, but Sun Wu Kong came out of nowhere and pummelled Bai Gu Jing with his red cudgel. Neither Tang Seng nor Zhu Ba Jie had seen Bai Gu Jing’s approaching attack, so they were both shocked that the Monkey King would murder this nice young girl.

“What have you done?” shouted Tang Seng. Only the monkey king could see the injured spirit separate from the young girl’s body and move to assuage the spirit’s wounds.

“Didn’t you see?” cried Sun Wu Kong. That was Bai Gu Jing in disguise.” Tang Seng and Zhu Ba Jie approached the dead girl, but there was nothing to suggest that the girl was Bai Gu Jing. Piggy did notice that the food that he had found so appealing had turned into rocks and sticks, but he said nothing to Tang Seng.

Sun Wu Kong quickly pushed Tang Seng and Zhu Ba Jie back into the magic circle so they would be protected in the event Bai Gu Jing returned.

Tang Seng then began murmuring a Buddhist chant and each time he repeated the chant, the golden headband on the monkey king grew tighter. When Monkey finally cried out in pain, Tang Seng scolded him and reminded Sun Wu Kong about the preciousness of life.

As Sun Wu Kong was recovering from his headache, an old lady approached them. Hiding behind the old lady so only Sun Wu Kong could see her, was Bai Gu Jing.

Zhu Ba Jie cried out. “Master, master. The young girl’s mother is coming. What do we do?”

Tang Seng once again stepped out of the circle and approached the women. “Venerable lady, your daughter is dead. She was accidentally killed by my overprotective disciple. Please forgive us. Please forgive us.”

“My poor innocent daughter. How could anyone suspect her gentle soul to be a threat to anyone? How could you? How could you?” She rushed towards Tang Seng.

Again, neither Zhu Ba Jie nor Tang Seng saw the transition from an old lady into the White-Boned Demon. What they did see was the lightning speed of Sun Wu Kong’s staff as it broke open the head of the old lady. They were both unaware that Bai Gu Jing had killed the real old woman earlier that day. In the eyes of Tang Seng and Zhu Ba Jie, Sun Wu Kong had murdered yet another innocent woman whose only crime had been to react to the death of her daughter.

“Wu Kong!”, yelled the master. “You’ve done it again. Another innocent person died due to your overreaction to an imaginary threat. You may no longer accompany me on my sacred journey. I cannot be protected by a murderer. Leave now, and never return!”

“But Master,” cried Sun Wu Kong. “The old lady was Bai Gu Jing as well. Didn’t you see her fangs as she came in to kill you? Did you not see the speed and power of her movements? Those were not the moves of an old lady. That was Bai Gu Jing!”

“Leave now, Monkey. I am no longer your 师傅 Shīfù.” (master).

“Shifu. Shifu.” Monkey pleaded as he watched Tang Seng and Zhu Ba Jie continue on.

But the Monkey King could not leave – so he hid where he could not be seen. Sun Wu Kong knew that his master and his friend were in grave peril and that the violence he had been guilty of committing was only to protect his master and the precious scriptures. So, he followed at a distance and when they were stopped by an old man, Sun Wu Kong’s hair once again stood on end.

“Nan wu a mi to fo, nan wu a mi to fo” (南无阿弥陀佛) The old man was chanting a time-honored Buddhist prayer. Hiding behind him was Bai Gu Jing.

Zhu Ba Jie asked Tang Seng. “Master. May I go bless that old man and give him an offering.”

Tang Seng responded. “No, let me go. You’re too ugly. I’m afraid you would frighten him off.” Zhu Ba Jie stood pouting.

Tang Seng approached the old man and said. “Greetings, honorable gentleman.”

“Hello, kind sir.” said the old man. “Welcome to our countryside.”

“Do you have a family?” enquired Tang Seng

“I have a young daughter.” Responded the old man. “She left this morning and has not yet returned. My wife went out looking for her, but she hasn’t come home either.”

“Master” whispered Zhu Ba Jie loudly. “Those were the two people that ‘monkey’ killed.”

As the old man reacted in feigned horror, Tang Seng shouted out. “We are so sorry. Forgive us, please!”

“Forgive you?” Bai Gu Jin shouted as she threw down the husk of the old man and appeared in all of her ugliness and splendor. “Ha, ha, ha! Not only will I forgive you, I will consume you. I will eat you and then I will live forever. And since you banished Sun Wu Kong after he stopped me twice, no one will come to your rescue!”

Bai Gu Jin stepped forward to devour Tang Seng, but this time, Sun Wu Kong dealt a death blow and Bai Gu Jin ceased to exist.

“Wu Kong, you’re here! But how?” asked Tang Seng.

“You are my shi fu, master. Wherever my master is, that is where I will be.” That was the only response the Monkey King had to give.

