



SHEN AND THE MAGIC BRUSH

A Tale from China Retold by Dianne de Las Casas

Illustration by Philip Chow

© Copyright 2008 The Story Connection

Note: This story appears in *Kamishibai Story Theater: The Art of Picture Telling* (Teacher Ideas Press 2006).

There was once a boy named Shen. But he was no ordinary boy for Shen was blessed with extraordinary talent. When he dipped his brush in paint and stroked the color on a surface, his paintings came to life.

One day, Shen heard the sweet chirping of crickets. It made him want to paint a cricket. So he dipped his brush and began painting on the road.

A herald from the Imperial Palace happened to be walking along. “Stop!” he cried, “you are defacing the property of the Empress of China!” The man looked down and saw Shen’s cricket. Suddenly, the cricket came to life and jumped up.

“I can’t believe it!” the man said. “It’s magic!” He brought Shen to the Imperial Palace to meet the Empress.

The Empress looked at Shen and said, “I am very unhappy. My palace is dreary. And I am weary. Paint me something extraordinary to make me happy.”

Shen thought for a moment and then bent down. He dipped his brush and painted something extraordinary. When Shen was finished, he picked it up. It was a colorful, ripe peach.

The Empress cried, “A peach! You paint me an ordinary peach?! You should be punished!” She ordered Shen to the dungeon and took away his brush.

The Empress said, “His brush must contain the magic. Paint me a golden throne!” The herald picked up the brush and began painting but nothing happened. Many tried but no one could get the brush to work.

Frustrated, the herald threw the brush into the dungeon. Shen was lonely in the dungeon by himself but now he had his brush so he began painting. With every stroke of the brush, he felt better.

Shen painted rolling hills, tall bamboo, a beautiful panda, and a majestic stallion. The walls shimmered with beauty and then came to life. The horse looked at Shen and whinnied.

“Yes,” said Shen, “I would like to go home.” He climbed upon the horse’s back. The Empress heard the sound of the horse and ordered the dungeon door opened. Everyone was surprised to see Shen galloping away.

The royal herald and the Empress’ guards jumped on their horses and chased after Shen. Shen painted a large waterfall but they passed right through it. Shen then painted a grove of bamboo trees but they stampeded through it.

Finally, Shen painted a valley behind him. The royal herald and the Imperial guards saw it but it was too late. Down they fell!

The Empress followed too but on foot. She became lost forever in Shen’s elaborate landscape. As for Shen, he returned home to his family. He never once painted for gain. Shen only painted things that made the world more beautiful.

