

The Wandering Panda

[Working Title]

Chapitre Un – Comment le Nouveau Étudiant a fait la connaissance du Maître

It was late at night, which meant that the Master would be outside in the fields near his home, relaxing. And by relaxing, I mean to say that the Master would be punching and kicking his favourite oak tree's trunk until his hands and feet grew numb and frayed with cuts and bruises. He had been doing this for nearly three years now, and he had never missed a night yet. The tree was grand and probably ancient, unlikely to succumb to the Master's strikes, and the Master knew this. His goal wasn't to fell the tree for two reasons: Firstly, his oldest daughter was going through an environmental sort of stage, (Just the other day she was trying to get out of eating her meat, but *that* was something the Master would *not* allow.) and wouldn't have him killing anything he didn't have to. Secondly, his objective was something else entirely – his objective was to . . .well, no. I don't think it's right I teach you such an important lesson before you're ready.

Anyway, After another successful night of failing to cut down the Tree, the Master bowed to the ancient oak, conceding his defeat humbly.

"Until tomorrow night!" The Master whispered to his giant opponent. The Tree merely continued dancing in the midnight breeze, as it had always done, neither affirming nor dissuading the Master's challenge.

Finally, the second half of the Master's Night Relaxation regimen was that he sit and meditate until he either fell asleep, or felt like going home, and much to the Master's Wife's dismay, it was almost always the former.

Presently, the Master sat down under the tree's billowing branches, shielding himself from the faintly glowing moonlight. He then crossed his legs, and closed his eyes preparing either to drift off into a state of enlightenment, or a state of dormancy. At this time of night, he really didn't mind which.

It was several minutes later, and the Master was still awake, though not quite conscious. His mind was now like a vacuum – empty and sterile, yet ready to take in everything at once should anything disturb him.

I should probably inform you that *this* is where we begin the story proper.

Not far from the Master, hiding behind a tree much smaller than the Master's Favourite, a boy was hiding – watching. He really should have been getting along, back to the road. Maybe he could get in another mile or so, before morning came, but at the moment, he wasn't concerned at all about his original goal. Now, he was enthralled by the sight a little ways before him – a balding man trying to fell a tree with his bare hands and feet.

At first, the sight was comical. The man wasn't *much* of a sight, if you were looking for a warrior. He was tall, and didn't look starved or chubby, but that was all there was to him – or at least from where the Boy was standing.

Not wanting to return to the daunting task that lay ahead of him, the Boy stayed to watch the Man relentlessly attacking the Oak Tree for a little while longer. In minutes, he had begun to make bets with himself. *I bet he'll drop dead after long. Or, I bet he'll give up after this next one.*

But it was minutes (though it seemed like hours) later, and the Man was still attacking the Tree. It was then that the Boy began to notice that the Man had a certain system to his futile battle. He was combining punches with all sorts of different kicks – not like in any street fight he had seen, where the men (and sometimes even women) go after each other all helter-skelter like, but . . . gracefully, as if the tree were a blank canvas, and the Man was delicately applying his four paintbrushes, making the most beautiful painting he ever saw.

When the Man finally stopped, he sat down under the tree, apparently satisfied. After watching the Man strike for so long, he had half expected the tree to come crashing down – a testament that the Man's hard work was not all for naught.

The man had been sitting down, eyes closed for a few minutes now, and he showed no signs of getting up any time soon. Disappointed, the Boy finally realized how late it was getting, and that he really had to get going. He bent down to tie his shoe before he set out on the road once more. When he stood back up, he was met with a faint green light where the Master once was.

Will-o-the-wisp, He thought. He had seen that kind of glowing light twice before, and each time he had been too afraid to investigate. There were tales that the little Will-o-the-wisp that occasionally showed up were actually wonderful fairies that could grant any wish that pleased you . . . and then there were tales that said the wisps were actually vengeful spirits of the

dead, ready to switch places with whatever unlucky creature stumbled upon it.

Fairy or Fury, the boy quickly decided to investigate. Fear was the thing that had been keeping him back in all of his short life. He had prevailed by sheer logic and creativity,

The Boy drew a deep breath, and focused himself on the spot where the Will-o-the-wisp was. He closed his eyes, took one more deep breath, and began to spring – full-force – forward....

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If you hadn't guessed by now, the light that the boy had seen wasn't the glow of a Will-o-the-wisp, but the glow of the Master's energy. The Energy the Master had been channeling was commonly called 'Ki' by natives to that land. Ki was said to exist inside all things, but it took a lot of training for a lot of years to manifest outside the body . . .

Unfortunately for the boy, the Master had chosen an inconvenient time to get up to leave for home, and by the time the boy reached the spot, it was not the Will-o-the-wisp the boy was headed for, but for the master's punching tree.

With as much force as a Nine-Year-Old could apply, the boy hit the great tree.

He blacked out.

[END OF PREVIEW]