

Dingding and Dangdang 1 Brothers

by CAO Wenxuan

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Dingding and Dangdang

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Chapter 1	Splash!.....	1
Chapter 2	Boundless Joy.....	15
Chapter 3	To a Dog, “Daddy!”	21
Chapter 4	To a Man, “Daddy!”	29
Chapter 5	Beast in a Cage.....	33
Chapter 6	A Slap in the Face	39
Chapter 7	One Goat, Two Goats.....	45
Chapter 8	Grandma’s Cane.....	55
Chapter 9	Starving Duck.....	61
Chapter 10	Big Belly again.....	69
Chapter 11	Rainy Night	73



Chapter 12	The Same Cry.....	77
Chapter 13	Tail	83
Chapter 14	Sighs.....	89
Chapter 15	Big Bird on the Roof.....	93
Chapter 16	Fire	99
Chapter 17	Mom's Gone.....	107
Chapter 18	Sunken Boat	113
Chapter 19	Enchanting Kiln.....	121
Chapter 20	Dad's Gone.....	125
Chapter 21	Dingding and Dangdang	131
Chapter 22	Singing Bells	137
Chapter 23	Lost.....	143

Chapter 1 Splash!



One quiet autumn day, Dingding narrowly escaped death...

Since daybreak, he had been sitting by the river, gazing at the water as it flowed in front of Sesame Village.

The river no longer had the wild currents and ripples that it did during summertime. It was clear and still. The water was so clear, you could see the fish swimming at the bottom. The sky, high and bright, was reflected on the water's surface. The sky in the water was even clearer than the sky up above. The air was still. The clouds were like a herd of fluffy goats quietly sleeping in the river.

The world seemed like the pendulum of a grandfather clock that had stopped swinging.

It wasn't until noon that the water finally came alive.

A little bird suddenly landed in the river!

Under the sun, little beads of water splashed and glistened.

Dingding's dull eyes brightened. His body tensed. There in the reflection of the sky was a big brown bird.

An eagle!

It circled gracefully in the calm air. Sometimes it would tilt its head and stare intently at the little bird in the river with its piercing bright eyes.

The little bird had feathers that were black and white. The black parts were very black and the white parts were very white. Its feathers clung to the surface of the water. Its two pea-sized eyes were filled with fear. It flapped its wings to try to fly. Perhaps it was hurt or perhaps its feathers were too wet, but it couldn't lift off. Worse yet, its wild flapping only invited an even more ferocious glare from the hungry eagle.

Just as the eagle began to cleave through the air toward the water, Dingding stood up and screamed.

The scream seemed to have shaken the eagle's will. After descending for a dozen or more meters, it eased into a roll and finally spread its wings wide. It leaned into the air and steadily glided away.

The little bird floated motionlessly on the water.



Its feathers glistened with a golden sheen.

Dingding stared at it blankly.

The little bird tried fruitlessly to flap its way back into the sky.

Dingding walked to the water's edge. There wasn't a single person walking along the riverbank, nor were there any boats in the water.

His steps were slow, but he steadily walked into the water while keeping an eye on the little bird.

The sun hung high above the river.

Dingding's feet touched the water. He was only four years old.

Under the high canopy on the shore facing the wide river, he seemed especially small. It was as if he didn't even realize he was walking into a river. It was as if he was simply walking into a crop field.

Every once in a while, the little bird would flap its wings.

Little by little, Dingding's body was immersed in water. First his shin, then his waist, finally his chest...

His eyes were focused on the little bird.

His shoulders were soon under water.

Sitting on an old willow tree on the riverbank, five little magpies watched him silently. By the time his neck touched

the water, the magpies jumped off the tree branches and began chirping frantically above the river.

Dingding kept walking slowly ahead. Soon the water reached his chin.

But the water didn't seem to bother him. It was as if he were just walking in a crop field.

Two little magpies flew to the village on the other side of the river. One landed on the roof of the courtyard of Dingding's home. "Caw, caw, caw!" it squawked, in an urgent tone.

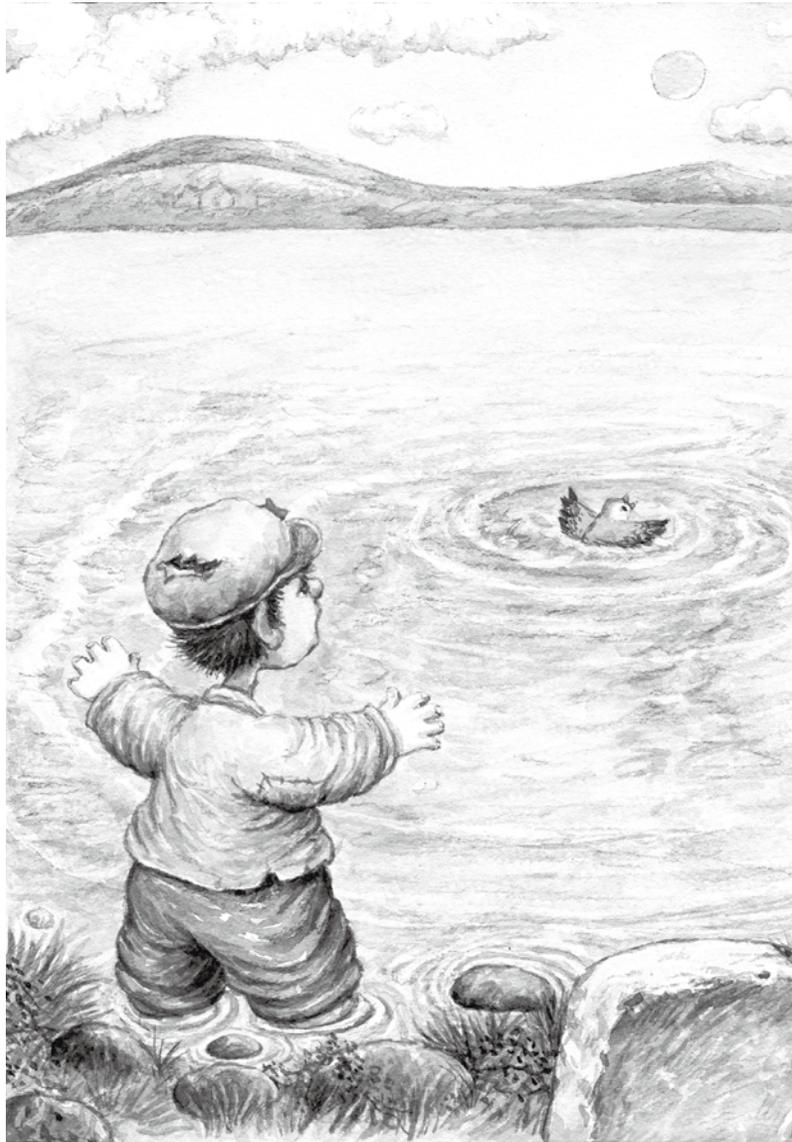
Children playing in the village saw the dancing magpies and found them very amusing. Their eyes followed the magpies around and around in circles. In a village alley, an old man looked up and saw the magpies. He mumbled, "Stupid birds, quit yer yapping!" and went on his way.

Grandma, who was working in the vegetable garden, looked up and saw the anxious magpies. She wondered what was wrong. Had they seen ghosts?

Many people from Sesame Village looked up, but none of them understood what the magpies were trying to tell them.

By then, Dingding's eyes were at the same level as the little bird.

The little bird melded into its reflection in the water and



looked as big as a duck.

Dingding reached for the bird with his hands when he suddenly slipped. Dingding fell into the water. After struggling, he popped back up to the surface. To his surprise, the little bird erupted out of the water and flapped to the sky with all its might.

About an hour later, a boy named Liang from Sesame Village came to play by the river. He noticed a shirt floating in the middle of the river, but because he was so focused on his game, he didn't think much about what he saw. After playing for a while longer, it suddenly dawned on him. He turned around immediately to look at the river more closely. It wasn't a shirt in the river at all, but a boy floating with his face down. He was so scared, he dropped down to the ground rear end first. A few moments later, he stood up and ran to the village screaming, "Someone fell in the river! Someone fell in the river!"

His scream roused everyone on both sides of the big river. People ran to the water in droves. The sound of people sloshing and splashing filled the air.

The first to arrive was a young man. He didn't even bother to take off his clothes when he dove into the river and swam toward the child.

Right behind him were several more people jumping into the water.

The young man quickly grabbed the child. The others swam vigorously and helped raise the child above the water as they swam back to shore.

Soon someone recognized the child, "Isn't this the child from Ding Wang's family?"

Others studied the child's face and nodded, "It's him alright!"

By the time Grandma, Dad, and Mom arrived from their farm work, Dingding was already being hurried to the threshing field.

They heard someone shout, "Hurry up and bring an ox! Hurry up and bring an ox!"

This part of the country was full of rivers. Children falling in was nothing out of the ordinary. As far as they knew, there was only one way to rescue a drowned child. First, you must place the child face down on the back of an ox. Then, with one person holding the child, one person leading the ox, and a third herding it to a trot, water would be bounced out of the child. As long as the child hadn't died yet, this method usually worked.

"Bring an ox! Bring an ox!"



"Where are we supposed to find an ox these days?"

Oxen used to be everywhere in this region. But nowadays, one could hardly find them anymore.

Dingding was spread out on the grass. Everyone looked worried but no one knew what to do without an ox.

Mom rushed through the crowd and held Dingding against her breast, loudly crying "Baby! Baby!"

At that time, Dingding didn't have a name yet. "Dingding" was a name that Grandma gave him many years later. He was given a name when he was born. It was something like "Dong

Lin," meaning "Eastern Woods." His parents even consulted with the wise principle of the elementary school to come up with the name. Dingding didn't really take to the name. When grown-ups called him that, he was as unresponsive as a rock. So his family stopped using his name and simply called him "baby." The other villagers usually called him "fool." When they said "Dong Mu," he didn't respond, but when they said "fool," he did.

Afraid that Grandma's heart wouldn't be able to handle seeing Dingding unconscious, several women kept her away from child.

Dad kneeled on the ground holding his head in his hands. This was what Dad did when he was confronted with pain, difficulty, anger, or despair.

Someone remembered, "Old man Hulong might have an ox!"

"That's right! He owns an ox!"

"Go and get it!"

Immediately, someone squeezed through the crowd and ran to old man Hulong's house.

Old man Hulong lived outside the village by a creek. It was quite far away. People were afraid that by the time the ox arrived, it would already be too late. Yet they couldn't think of

any other good ideas, so they just stood around and waited. They stood watchfully. Little by little, the crowd began to settle down.

Only Grandma and Mom continued to scream in unison, "Baby! Baby!"

It was as if Dingding was sleeping.

Finally, there came a sound, "Moo..."

"The ox is here! The ox is here!"

The crowd became excited again.

When the ox arrived at the threshing field, someone quickly grabbed Dingding from his mother's embrace and laid him face down on the ox's back. Then, people started herding the ox. Boom, boom, the ox stomped. Its hooves bore into the dry cracked earth, and dust blew everywhere, forcing people to stand back.

Mom was still crying.

Grandma kept on hollering, "Baby, let's go home! Baby let's go home!"

That's what you say to try to bring back wandering spirits before they get all the way to the other world.

Dad was still kneeling on the ground holding his head.

The ox ran around and around in circles until it was frothing at the mouth, but there was no sign of any

movement from Dingding. His hands and feet hung limp over the ox's back. As the ox ran, Dingding's arms, legs, and head bobbed and bounced. His head hung like a gourd on a vine. Dingding was always tall and skinny with long arms, long legs, and a long neck. After being vigorously bounced, he looked even longer.

In the crowd, there were muted voices quietly debating.

"The ox has been running for so long. I'm afraid things don't look good."

"So what if they can't save him? What's the point of raising a fool anyway?"

"You shouldn't say that! Even a fool deserves to live!"

A young man joked, "Maybe when he wakes up, he won't be a fool anymore!"

The ox was exhausted, but with the flurry of whiplashes from behind, it had to keep running.

Just as people were starting to give up on him, Dingding's mouth suddenly opened and water poured out as if from a hose.

The ox ran two more laps and Dingding began to cry, "Waahhhh!"

"He's alive ! He's alive!"

Some applauded, some jumped, and others shouted for joy.

The ox came to a stop, huffing and puffing.

The four men who were whipping and running with the ox collapsed on the ground, exhausted.

Dad stood up and lifted Dingding up from the ox's back.

The women finally let Grandma into the crowd.

Mom still cried, "Baby."

Grandma used her hard and rough hands to caress Dingding's wet head, "Let's go home! Let's go home!"

Dingding turned his head to look at the people with an expression that said he had no idea what was going on.

Dad turned Dingding right side up and rested Dingding's head on his shoulder. As they walked home, Dingding shot a smile at the crowd. Then he smiled again for no reason.

"Fool!" cried the people behind him.