

kestrel with a broken wing fell off the branch and lay helplessly flapping on the ground. Some boys dashed up and killed it.

“Sure enough!” said the minister to himself as he left. The people were deeply impressed.

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INSPIRING, UNFORTUNATELY

The people of Emperor Reizei’s reign were buzzing over a spate of tengu mischief when a monk from Mount Hiei started home after a little trip down to the city. Walking back toward the mountain along Kitaōji Avenue, he came to a pack of boys beating a fierce-looking old kite they had caught. He scolded them sharply. “Why do you want to hurt the poor bird?” he asked. They said they were killing it for its feathers.

The monk felt so sorry for the kite that he traded his fan for it to the boys and let it go. The good deed made him rather pleased with himself.

A bit farther on, where the path started up the mountain, a funny, monkish-looking old fellow popped out of the bushes and came panting after the monk. Though the monk did his best to avoid him, the old fellow insisted on accosting him and thanking him effusively for having saved his life.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the monk answered cautiously. “Who are you?”

“You remember me, of course you do! I’m the one the boys were busy murdering on Kitaōji Avenue! How can I ever thank you? If there’s any wish of yours I can make come true, any little wish at all, just tell me. I’ve got a few magic powers, you see, and I’m sure I can do something nice for you!”

Confused by this astonishing offer, the monk hesitated, but the old fellow insisted till he finally replied, “Well, I don’t really *have* any special wishes any more, you know. I’m seventy now, after all, and I’ve lost any interest in fame or fortune. I hate to think where I’ll be born next time, yes, but I don’t suppose there’s anything you can do about *that*. So I don’t quite know what to say. Still, I often

imagine how wonderful it must have been when the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra on Vulture Peak, and I wish I could have been there too. Could you perhaps give me a vision of the scene?"

"Of course I can!" the old fellow cried. "I'm a veteran at shows like that!" He led the monk some distance up the hillside. "Now," he said, "close your eyes and open them again when you hear the Buddha preaching. But be careful! Don't get carried away and imagine that it's all real! I'll be in terrible trouble if you do."

The old fellow climbed farther up the hill. In a moment the monk heard the Buddha's voice proclaiming the Teaching and opened his eyes. The ground he stood on was lapis lazuli blue; the trees were all made of gold, silver, and jewels; and straight in front of him sat the Buddha, flanked by Monju and Fugen, on his Lion Throne. An infinite host of adoring saints, bodhisattvas, and gods clustered around the Buddha, before whom sat all the great disciples who appear in the scriptures. Sixteen kings, each the sovereign over a vast realm, were touching their jeweled crowns to the earth in homage, while flowers of four kinds floated down from the sky, exquisite fragrances perfumed the air, and angels filled the heavens with celestial music. The Teaching that poured from the Buddha's mouth was immeasurably stirring and profound.

At first the monk was simply awed by the old fellow's amazing skill; but every wonder, every miraculous touch, conspired to persuade him that this vision really was the moment long ago when the living Buddha preached, and he was quickly swept away. Tears of ecstatic joy sprang to his eyes. Then, lost in adoration, he pressed his palms together, greeted the Buddha aloud, and threw himself prostrate on the ground.

Suddenly the mountain roared, and the vision vanished as thoroughly as a dream when the dreamer wakes. The monk, almost in shock, found himself as before on the wild mountainside. All he could do was to start walking again.

He had not gone far before the old fellow was back, complaining bitterly. "I *told* you not to get carried away!" he scolded. "You *promised*! Oh, how *could* you go back on your word like that? Your faith was so strong that it brought all the Guardians and Protectors down, and when they saw my show had taken in a true believer they gave me an awful beating. All my colleagues who were helping me were frightened to death and got away as fast as they