

“There were food shops and basket shops and lantern shops and silk shops, and every other kind of shop you could possibly imagine. Lights blazed out from inside the shops, and red and gold signs and banners swung in front of them.”

“There is a village in China called Shegu. All around it are flat fields where the farmers make vegetables grow, and far away on one side is a great highway, and far away on the other side is a river. The highway leads to a city, and the river leads to the sea. In this little village there once lived a boy called Little Pear.”

“All around the village were flat fields of cabbages and beans and onions, and far away on one side was a great highway that led to the city, and far away on the other side was a river.”

“Little Pear loved to stand on the high bank and look down on the swift muddy river and the ships sailing down it toward the sea. He would hold very tight to a huge willow tree with both hands and think, “I can never fall in — not if I am very careful, like this.”

“The river was swift and muddy. The sun shining on it made the ripples first brown and then blue.”

“There were all kinds of boats. Big boats with masts and sails and smaller boats with none, and boats with great fishing nets spread out like huge spiderwebs. There were flat boats, too, laden with things to sell. Some had cabbages, and some had rolls of matting, and some had bags that might be filled with all sorts of interesting things.”

“Their only pet was a yellow bird, who sang sweetly from his cage which swung by the open doorway.”

“Little Pear held tight to the willow tree and gazed at the ships going up and down. He was wishing that he would grow up soon, when suddenly he saw, drawing nearer and nearer, the loveliest kind of boat on the river. It was a houseboat...It was a long flat boat with a real little house on it, with a hole in the ceiling for the smoke to go through, and paper windows.”

“There was a brick stove at the back of the room where Little Pear’s mother cooked the meals...”

“There were two stone lions in front of the gateway, on either side of the red-painted door. They had curly manes, and mouths that looked as though they might be laughing or might be roaring.”

“Don’t get into mischief, Little Pear.”

“The river looked dark and shiny between its dust-colored banks.”

“There are two stone lions in front of the gateway, one on either side of the door.”

“Little Pear had forgotten all about skating now, he was so interested in fishing. He didn't mind sitting still even though he became so cold that his feet felt frozen to the ice.”

“Supper that night was delicious. Besides noodles with egg sauce, and tea, there was a crisp brown fish, the fish that Little Pear had caught for Shing-er.”

“The willows were pale green with their feathery new leaves.”

“When Little Pear went home that evening he found his mother placing a bowl of steamed dumplings on the table...”

“And Little Pear was so hot and thirsty that he thought he would go on to that village and get a cup of tea to drink before he turned back toward home.”

“Little Pear, here are some pennies. Run along and buy yourself a pretty toy.” “Thank you!” said Little Pear, reaching out in delight for the pennies. They had holes in the middle and were all strung on a string which was tied so that they could not slip off. Little Pear started forth in great excitement, almost tripping over the high doorstep. As he hurried along the street he counted his pennies — one, two, three, four — four pennies! He couldn’t remember ever having been so rich before.”

“Little Pear slipped away toward the street where the shops were, thinking, “Perhaps I can find a beautiful top like that! I have four pennies!””

“The kind man took him to a shop where there were round trays shaped high with steamed dumplings, fresh and hot, and other trays filled with delicious twisted breads.”

“Tang-hulurs were his favorite kind of candy. Before the tang-hulur man came in sight Little Pear knew just what the tang-hulurs would look like. Candied red berries on sticks, all frozen over with hard syrup. He knew what they would taste like too: sweet and sour, crisp and sticky, all at the same time.”

“One little boy was spinning a diabolo. It was like a great wooden spool. The little boy held a stick in each hand with a string between them, and he spun the diabolo on the string until it made a humming sound. Little Pear watched him. He watched him spin the diabolo and toss it into the air to catch it again.”

“Another boy was playing a game with a shuttlecock. The shuttlecock was made with three cocks’ feathers weighted with two pennies wrapped in a piece of cloth. The boy kicked the shuttlecock into the air with his foot and then before it could fall to the ground, he kicked it again into the air. Over and over again he did this until he had counted twenty-five kicks.”

“When Little Pear and Big Head came up it was the juggler who was performing. He was spinning plates on sticks. On each hand was balanced a stick, with a plate spinning on the end of each, and in the air a third plate was spinning! Before this plate could fall to the ground the juggler caught it on one of the sticks and the plate that had been on that stick before spun in the air instead...none of the three plates ever fell to the ground. At last the juggler caught all the plates on one stick...”

“Little Pear turned around, and there was his friend Big Head, calling to him from his gateway. “Come and see my new top!” he cried. “It is the most beautiful top in the whole world, and the fastest spinner!” “Ay-ah!” exclaimed Little Pear, and he looked at the top admiringly. It was certainly a beauty – a great pear-shaped silver top, with stripes of scarlet, pink and green.”

“...and the very first shop that he came to sold tinware. There were little tin teapots and tin saucepans, and they hung in bunches in front of the open shop and rattled merrily in the breeze. Little Pear stopped and looked at the tinware and thought that he would like a teapot of his own.”

“Big Head,” said Little Pear, “let’s pretend that this ditch is the Yellow River. My ship is a junk with three sails and I will race you to the next turn.”



“The toy shop was very wonderful. There were wooden swords painted in pink and green and gold. There were funny little monkeys made of clay covered over with chicken feathers, and round boxes made of gourds delicately carved...There were tigers, with smiling faces and green glass eyes. And, yes there were tops! Tops of all colors, striped and plain.”

“In the fields the farmers were working. Water was running swiftly through the ditches they had cut, criss-crossing the fields. These ditches were meant to water the onions, the beans, the cabbages, and all the other vegetables, but the children of the village thought that they made splendid rivers for toy ships.”

“The toy shop was the most interesting place in the whole village. Nearly always there were children straying in and out of it, looking at all the toys with bright black eyes. Sometimes they had money to spend, and sometimes they just came to look.”

“The village of Wuku was three miles away. Little Pear’s father was going to walk there, pushing his wheelbarrow full of vegetables. The wheelbarrow stood in the courtyard, all ready and laden with the onions and cabbage. Little Pear walked around the wheelbarrow, looking to see whether there was any space anywhere big enough for a small boy to squeeze into. And yes! There was one. Little Pear crawled in among four cabbages and covered himself up as well as he could with some onions.”