

LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST

A Japanese Zen tale

Adapted by Carole L. Cooney

Setting: A forest of trees leading to a steep cliff

Characters:

Narrator

Isamu: a *brave* young man

Torao: a wild *tiger*

(The above italicized words give the meaning of the Japanese name.)

Narrator: The sun flashed through the grove of Angelica trees as Isamu gathered shoots from the ends of the tree branches.

Isamu: Ah! I think I have enough shoots for dinner. They are so young and tender. They will be delicious fried with tempura batter for my evening meal. (stretching) Ahh... Now I feel like going for a walk and return before sundown. I'll just set these shoots down under this tree.

Narrator: Through the drooping light gold and dark green leaves of the Angelica trees, Isamu made his way over the soft soil.

Isamu: What lovely shapes these trees have. They are just like pyramids of leaves stretching to the heavens.

Narrator: As Isamu rounded a giant outcropping of rock, he saw his favorite tree, the Raisin tree.

Isamu: Ha ha! Look at those sweet little fruits. I shall grab some fistfuls to put in my sack. But first I will test their sweetness.

Narrator: Just as Isamu reached up and grabbed a cluster of small cream-colored fruit, he heard a distant rustle in the low bushes. He stood still and silent. He only moved his eyes, to the left and to the right. And then he saw it!

Isamu: (whisper) Torao! Torao!

Narrator: Frantically, Isamu began to run.

Torao: (roar) WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY FOREST? What an easy catch you will be. Ha! I think I'll just walk a bit and let you run and run until you fall down.

Narrator: Leaping over rocks and boulders, slipping and sliding down crumbling stones, Isamu ran and ran, then suddenly stopped gasping for breath. Torao walked with ease through the trees, taking a cool sip from a nearby stream while keeping a watchful eye on Isamu.

Torao: I wonder if this boy knows where he is going? I better catch up before I lose him.

Narrator: But it was too late. Isamu landed at the edge of a cliff. He turned around and saw the tiger running at full speed toward him.

Isamu: Oh! Where can I go to escape Torao?

Narrator: Isamu carefully looked over the edge of the steep cliff. He saw a strong vine hanging from a crevice in the rocks. He reached down, grabbed the vine and jumped.

Isamu: I'll just hang here until the tiger gets tired and wanders off.

Torao: (roaring) SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ESCAPE? I HAVE FRIENDS. JUST LOOK DOWN.

Narrator: Isamu looked down and saw three more tigers roaring, pacing and waiting for him to drop.

Isamu: Oh no! There's a tiger above me and tigers below me. What am I supposed to do now?

Narrator: Just then the tigers were silent. But Isamu heard a little crunching sound. He looked at the vine and saw a little mouse standing on a ledge, chewing on the vine.

Isamu: Please little mouse stop! Please stop!

Narrator: But the mouse was hungry and kept eating the vine.

Isamu: (crying) I don't know what to do. There is no one to help me.

Narrator: As the tears fell from his eyes, they landed on a little rock. Isamu looked closely and saw a tiny plant growing in the rock's shadow. On the plant, there was something red. Looking closer Isamu saw it was a wild strawberry.

Isamu: Now I know what to do.

Narrator: Isamu smiled brightly as he plucked the strawberry from the plant and popped it into his mouth.

Why did Isamu pick and eat the strawberry?

What lessons are in this story?