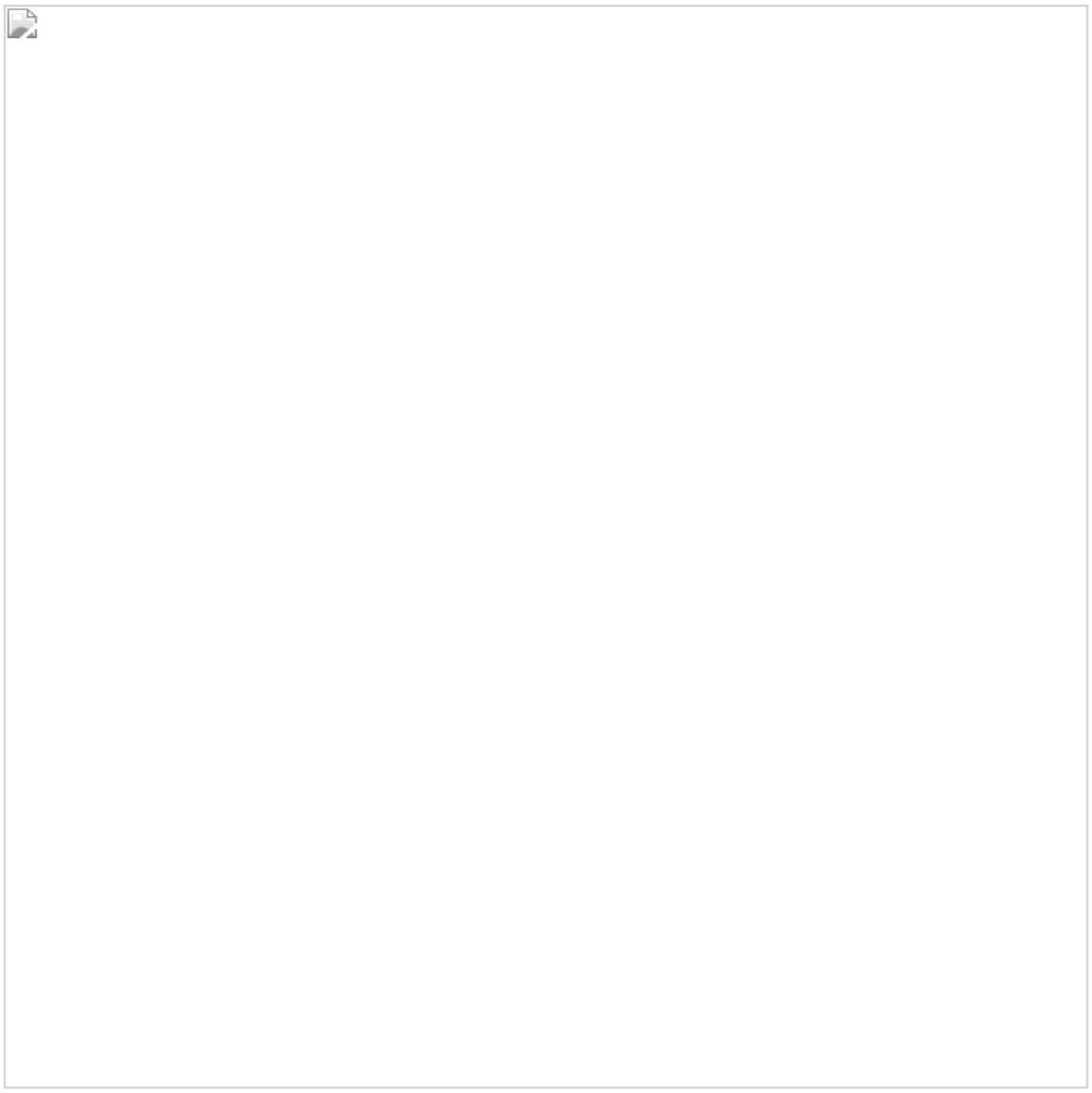
COLORING THE CLASSICS

The Golden Beetle

A Tale from China



“What we shall eat to-morrow, I haven't the slightest idea!” said Widow Wang to her eldest son, Ming-li, as he started out one morning to look for work.

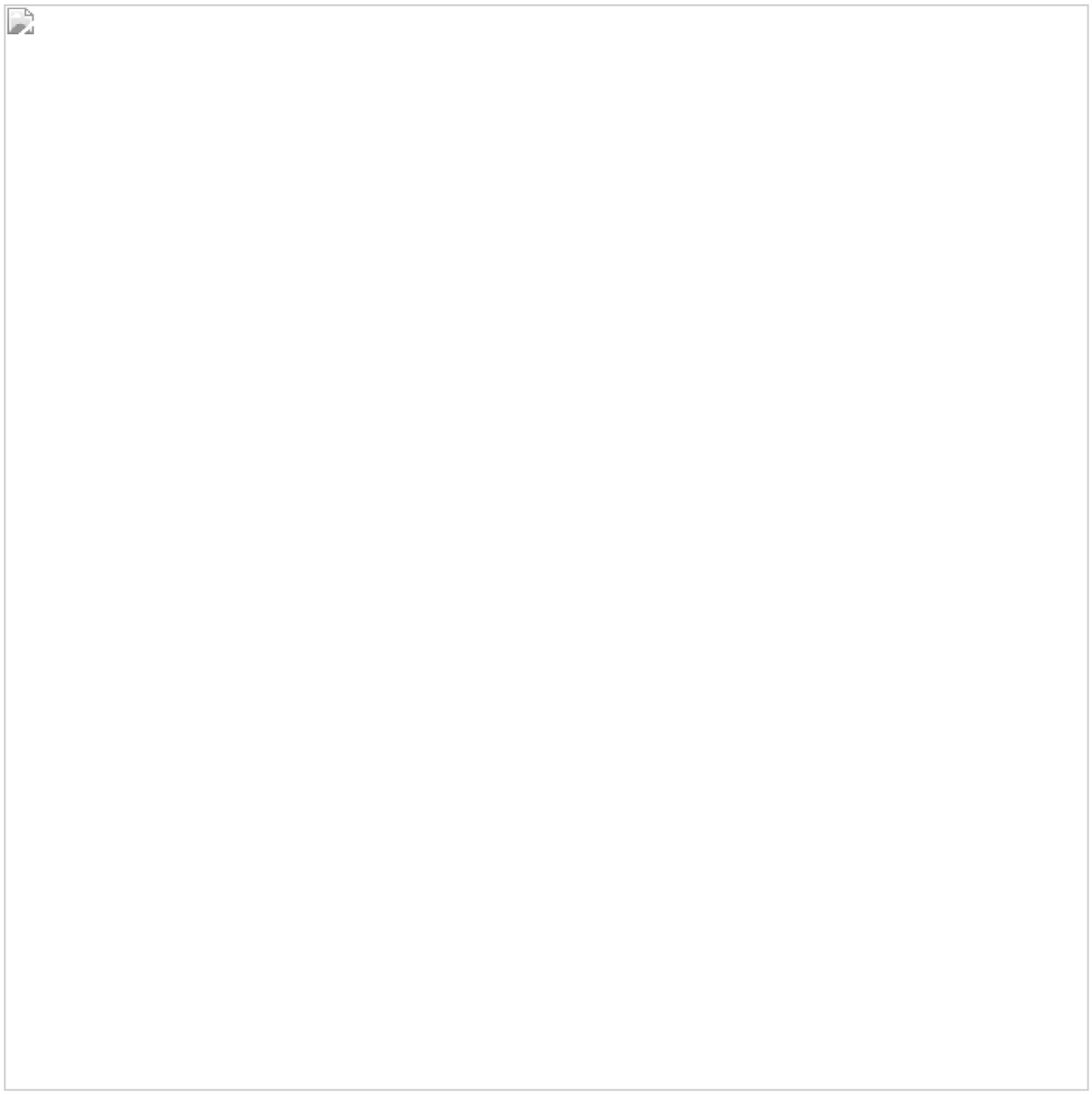
“Oh, the gods will provide,” said the boy, trying to speak cheerfully, though in his heart he did not know which way to turn.

TALK ABOUT IT

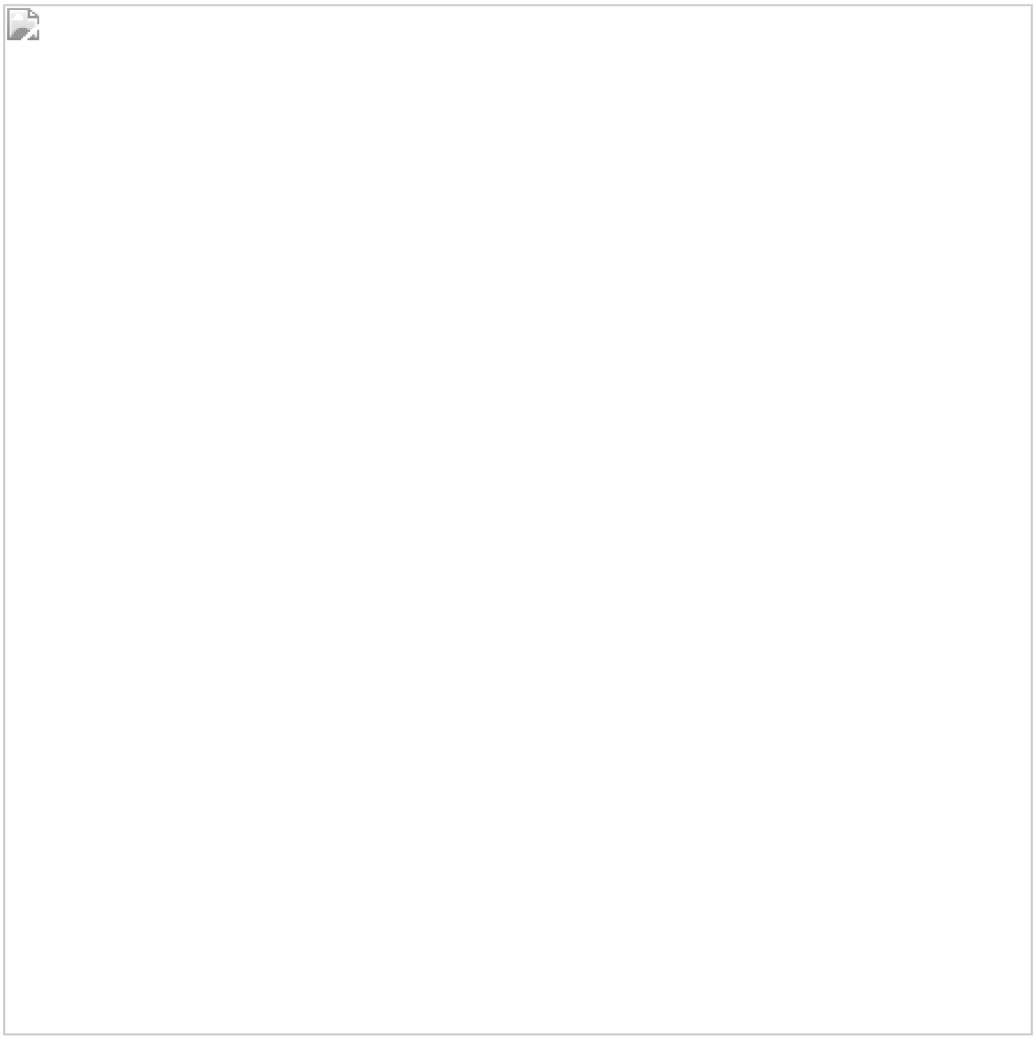
Ming-li tried to speak cheerfully even though he was worried. Have you ever done that?

This book belongs to _____

The Golden Beetle · another picture



A Hard Winter



The winter had been hard, with deep snow and violent winds. The roof of the Wang house had fallen in, and Ming-li, up all night in the bitter wind, caught pneumonia.

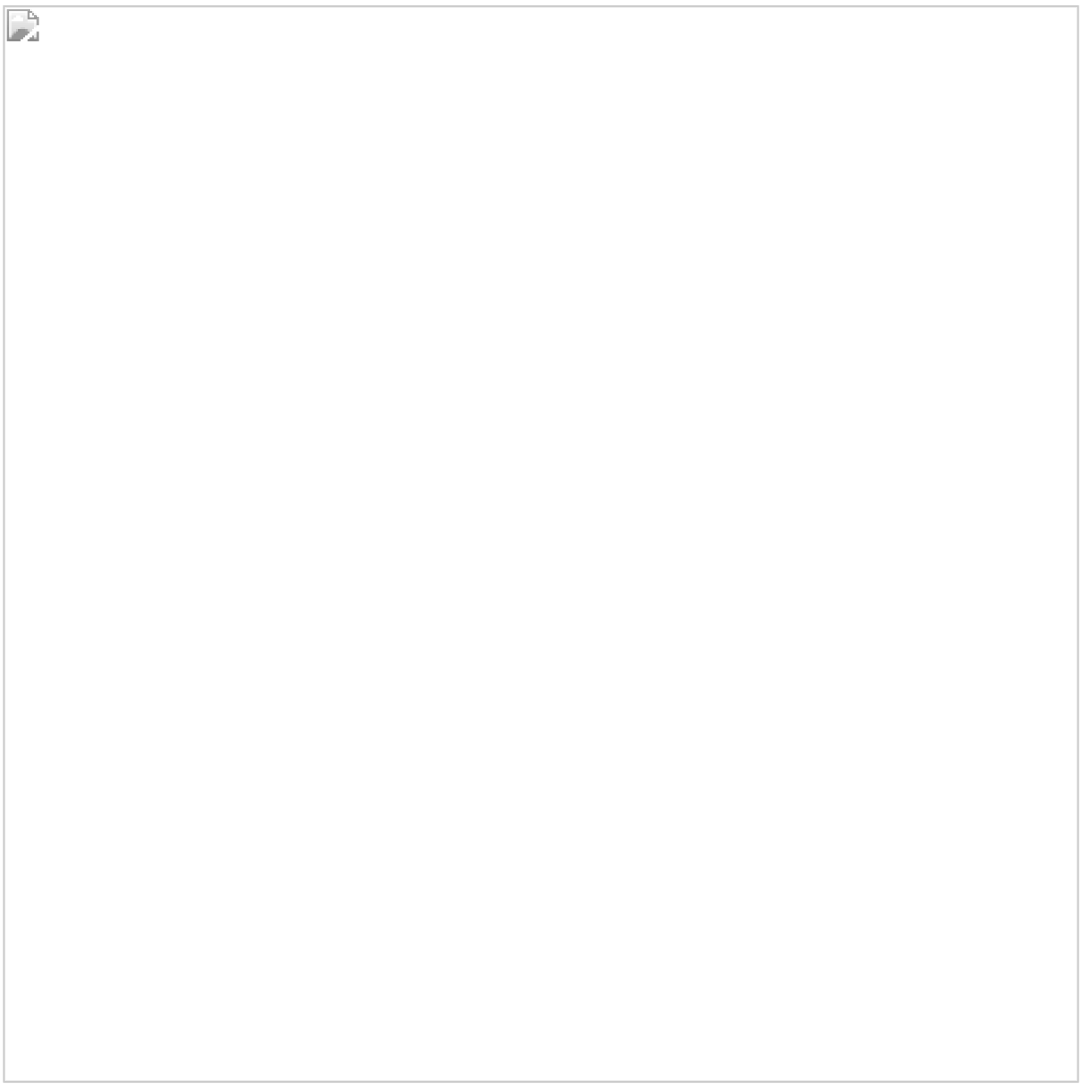
Medicine used up all their savings, and another boy filled his place at the shop. When he got up he was too weak for hard labour, and there seemed to be no work anywhere.

Night after night he came home, trying not to be discouraged, while his mother suffered for want of food.

In the corner the dog Blackfoot and the cat Whitehead curled up together to keep warm. They were nearly starved.

TALK ABOUT IT

Ming-li worked hard to take care of his mother. Who takes care of you, and how can you take care of them?

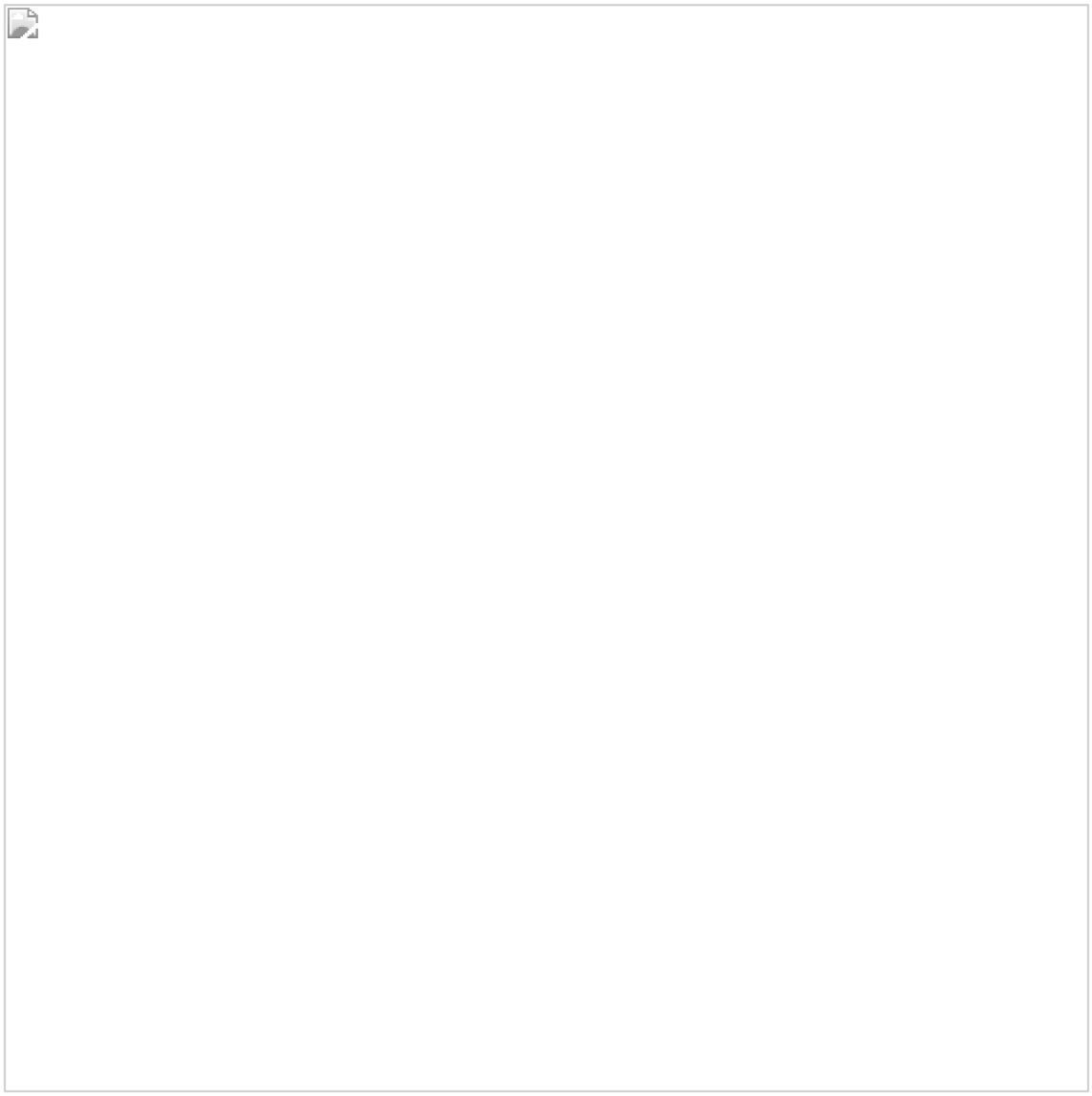


Think about it

1. Who lived in the Wang house?

- ○ A widow, her son, a dog and a cat
- ○ A farmer and his horse
- ○ Two brothers and a pig

The Priest at the Gate



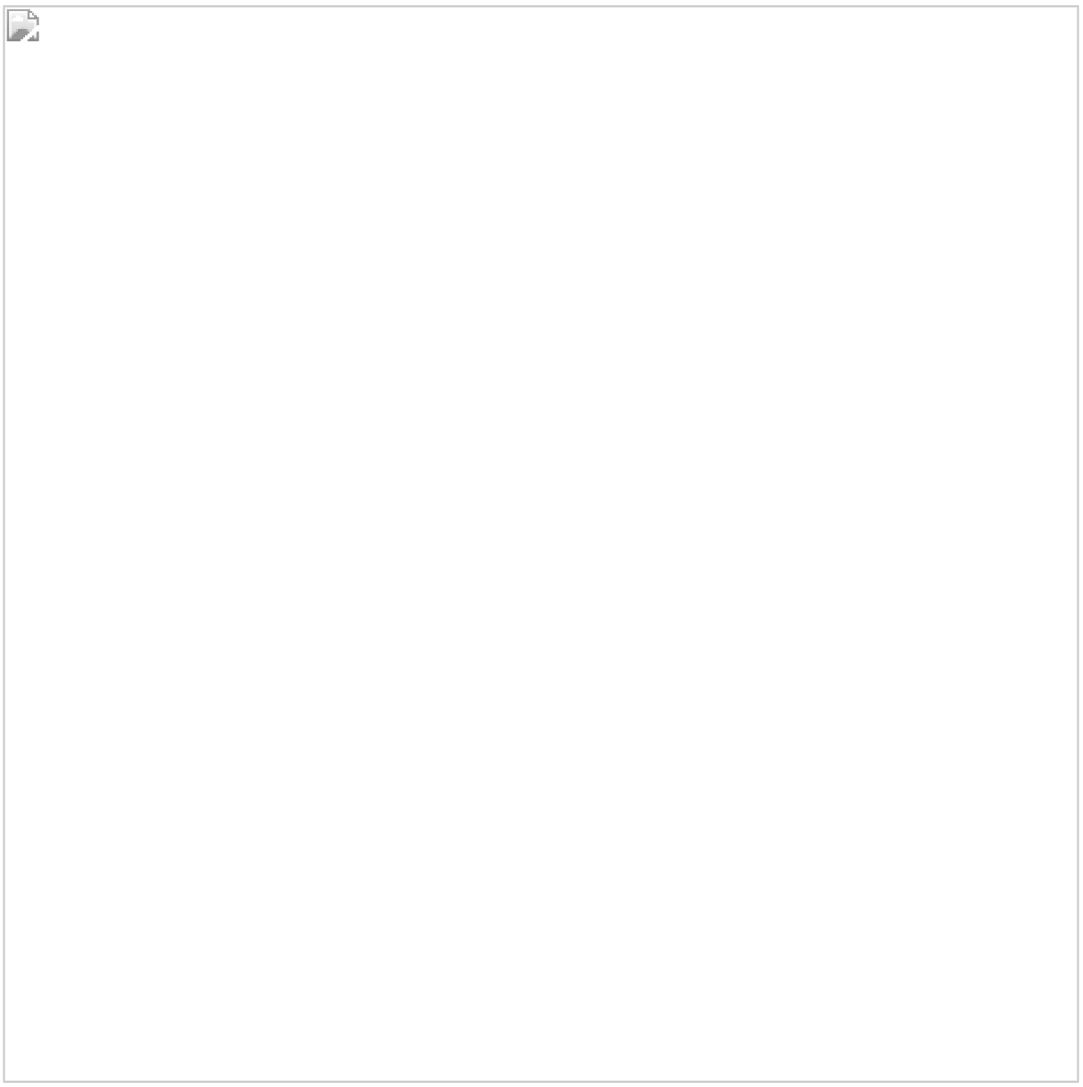
Just then there was a loud knocking at the gate. In the doorway stood an old bald-headed priest. The widow said she was sorry, but they had nothing.

“I didn't come for alms,” said the priest kindly, “but only to see what I could do to help you.” The gods had seen how faithfully her son served her, and they would reward him. “You likewise have been a good mother and shall receive the gift I am now bringing.”

“Here in my hand I hold a tiny golden beetle,” he said. “I will leave this precious thing with you, a present from the god of filial conduct.”

TALK ABOUT IT

The priest said the gods saw how well Ming-li cared for his mother. Why do you think that mattered?

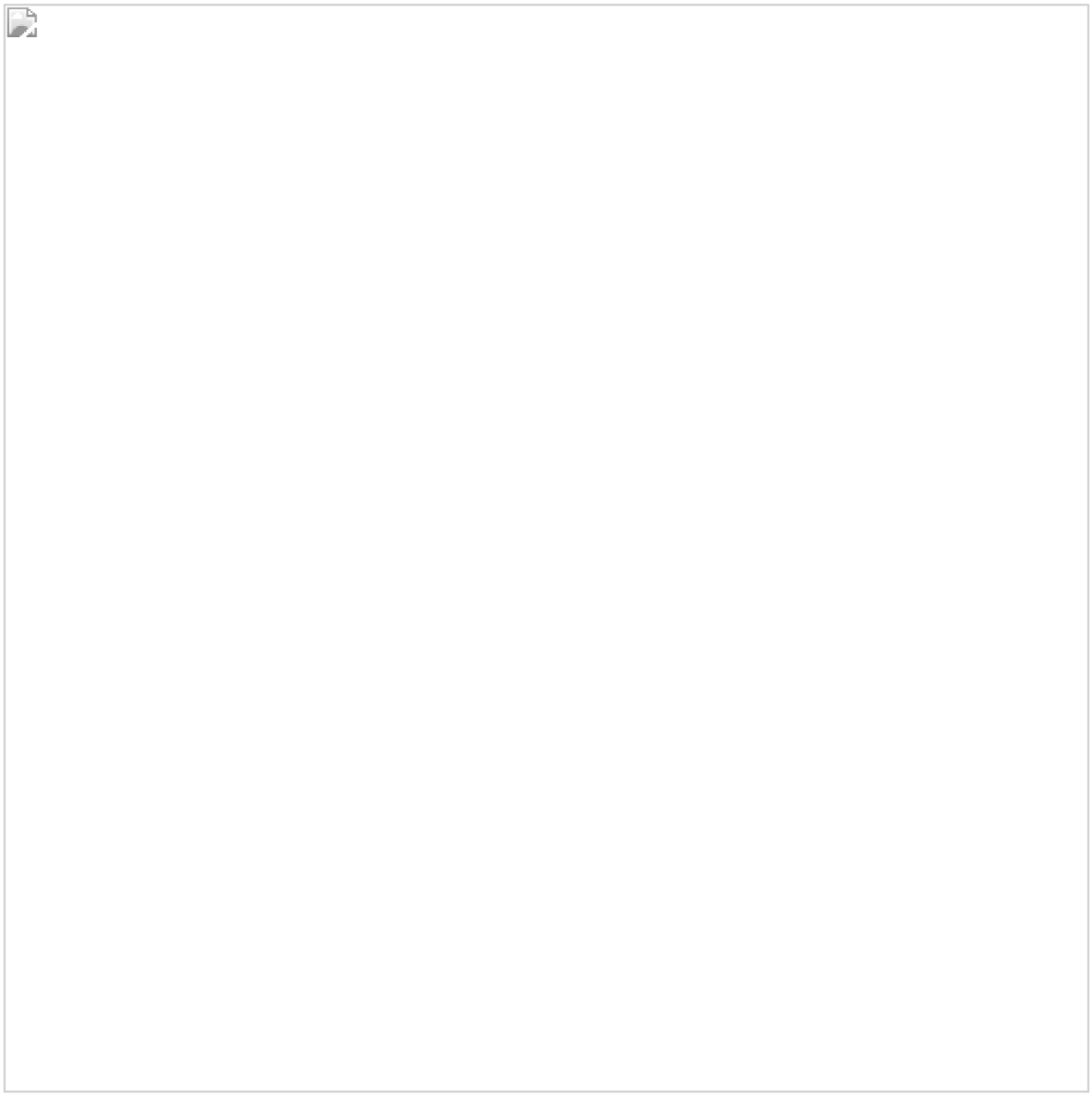


Think about it

1. What did the priest give the widow?

- ○ A bag of rice
- ○ A tiny golden beetle
- ○ A purse of coppers

Dumplings, Dumplings



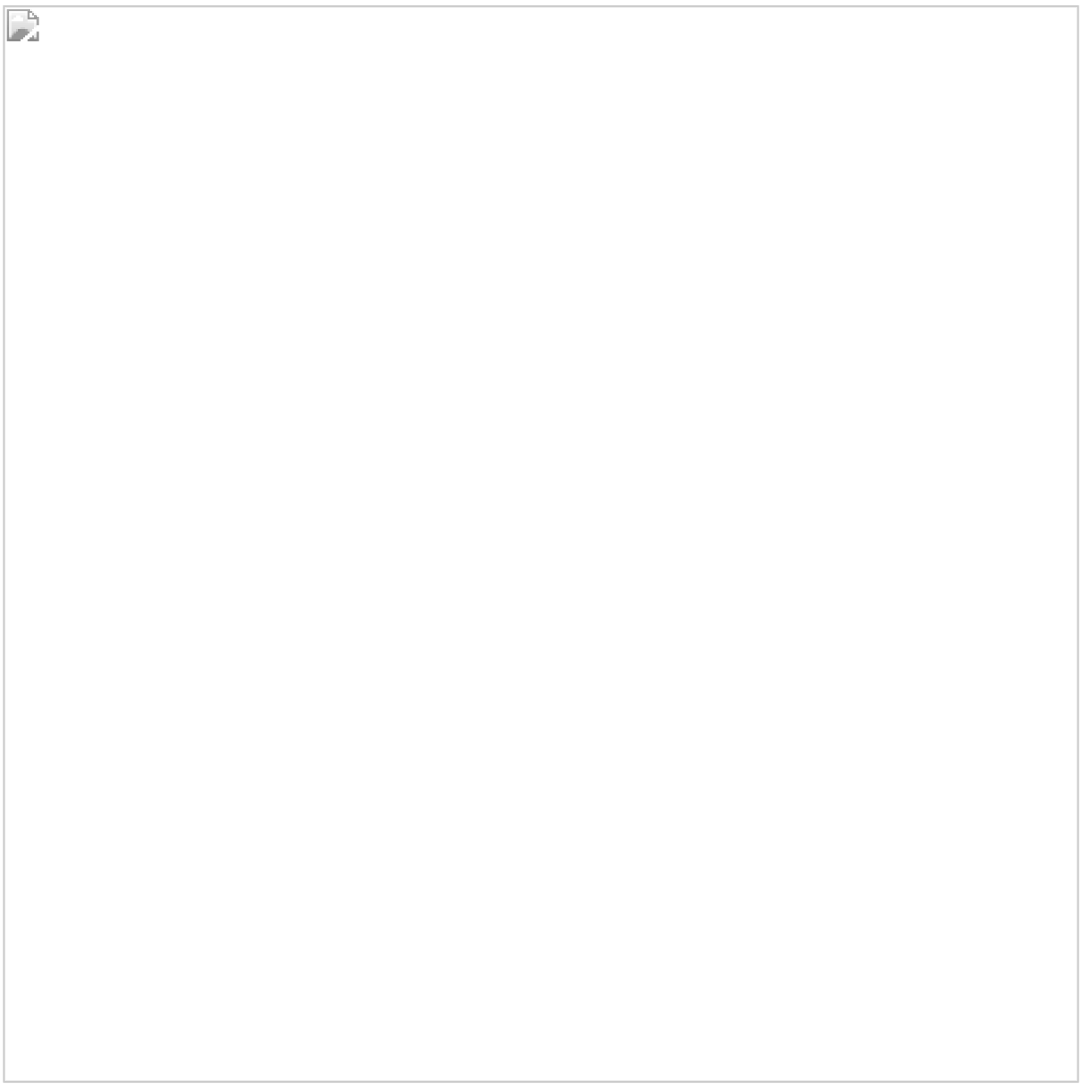
“But you must by no means sell this golden beetle,” said the priest, “for it has the power to fill your stomachs as long as you live.” She must boil it in water, name the food she wanted, and lift the lid in three minutes.

When he was gone, the old woman dropped the beetle in boiling water and said: “Dumplings, dumplings, come to me, / I am thin as thin can be. / Dumplings, dumplings, smoking hot, / Dumplings, dumplings, fill the pot.”

Off came the lid! The pot was full of pork dumplings. She ate and ate, and fed the cat and the dog too.

TALK ABOUT IT

What food would you ask the beetle for?

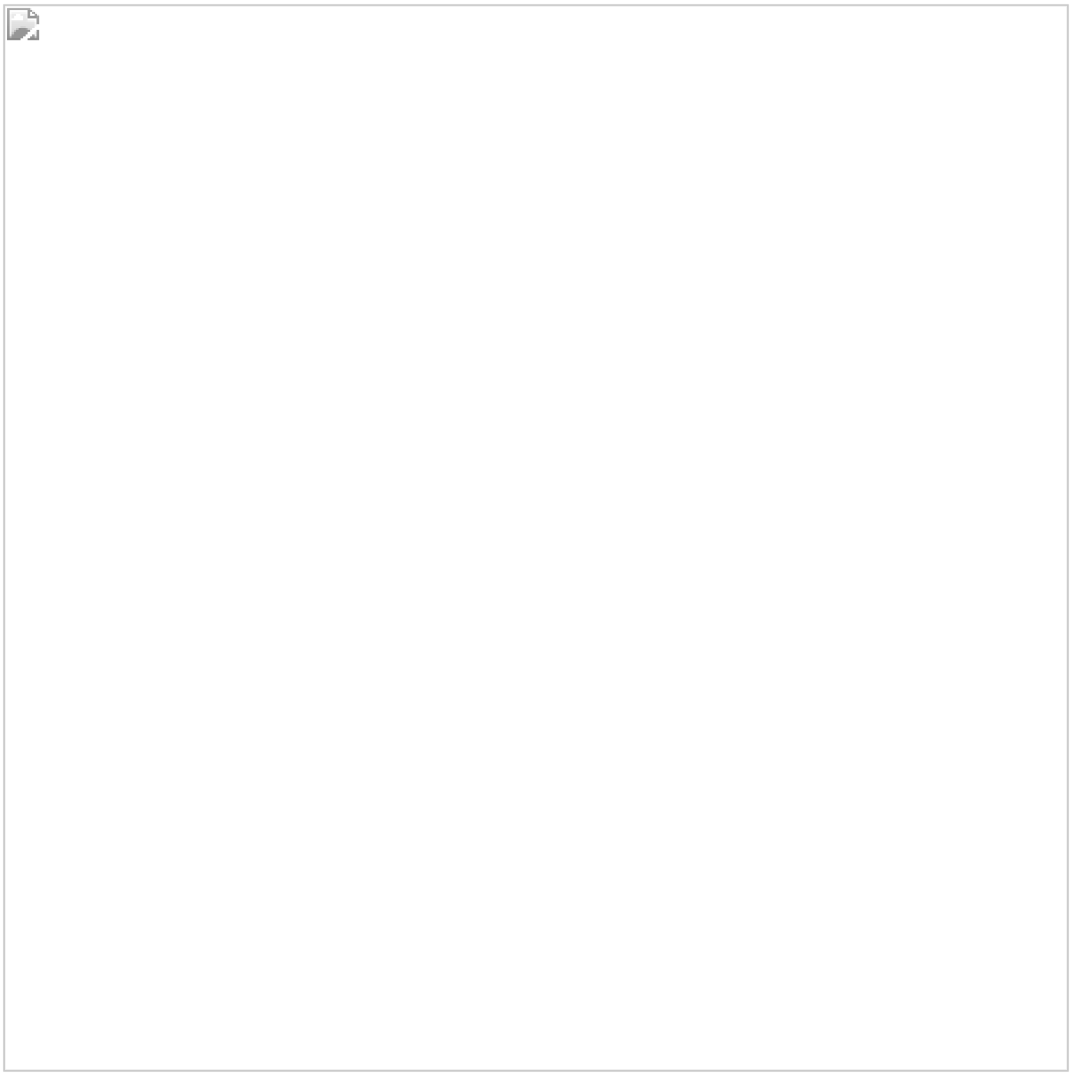


Think about it

1. What did the priest say she must never do with the beetle?

- ○ Sell it
- ○ Show it to the cat
- ○ Take it outside

Eat and Ask No Questions



“Good fortune has come at last,” whispered Blackfoot to Whitehead. “There's no use questioning the gods.”

When Ming-li came home with a dark cloud on his brow, his mother cried, “Come, come, lad! Clear up your face and smile, for the gods have been good to us.” She dropped in the beetle.

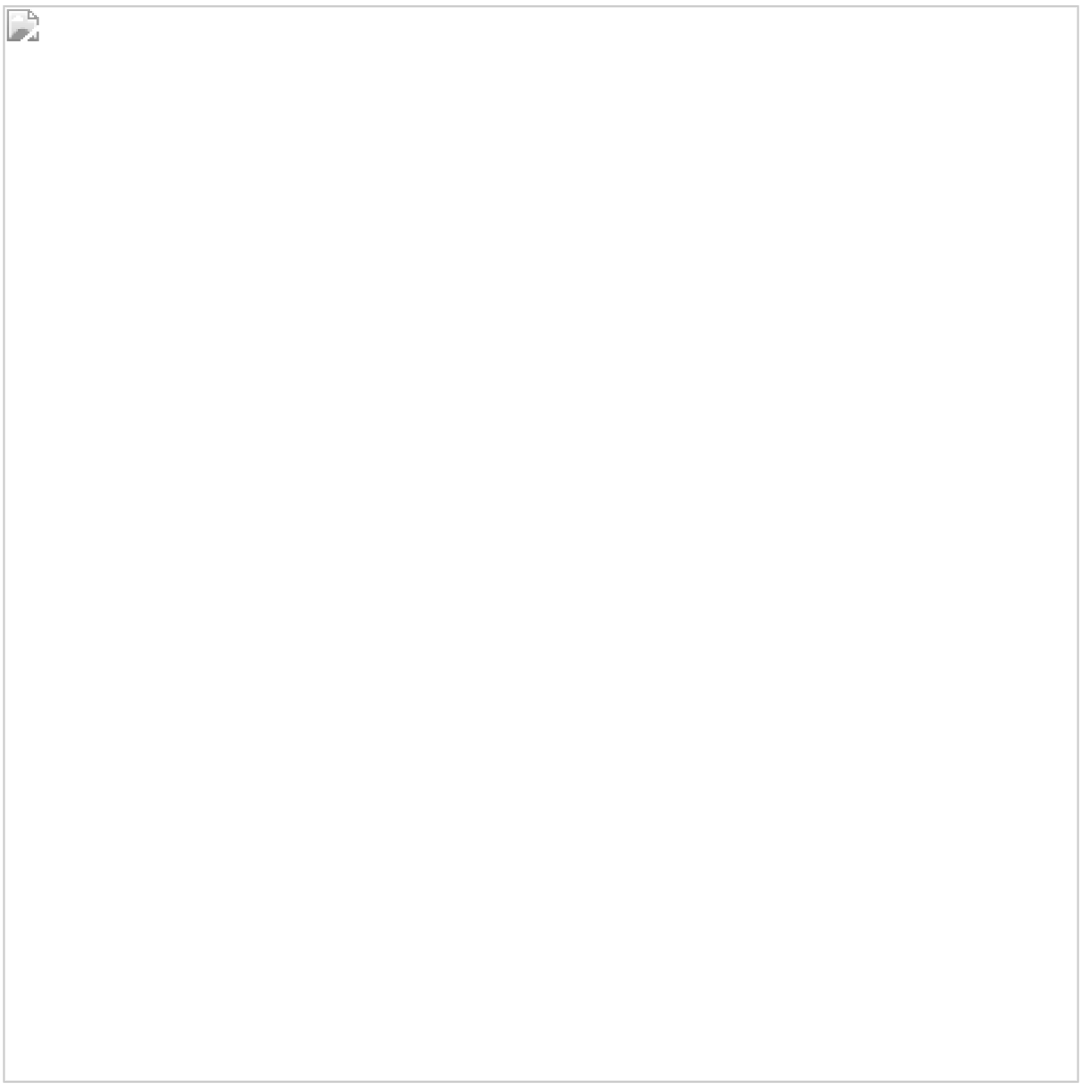
Soon the table held a huge platter of his favourite pork dumplings. “Eat and ask no questions,” said Widow Wang. “When you are satisfied I will tell you everything.”

When he had eaten, she held out the beetle and told him all. Then she set the leftovers on the floor for Blackfoot and Whitehead.

TALK ABOUT IT

Ming-li was too surprised to speak at first. What was the best surprise you ever had?

Eat and Ask No Questions · another picture

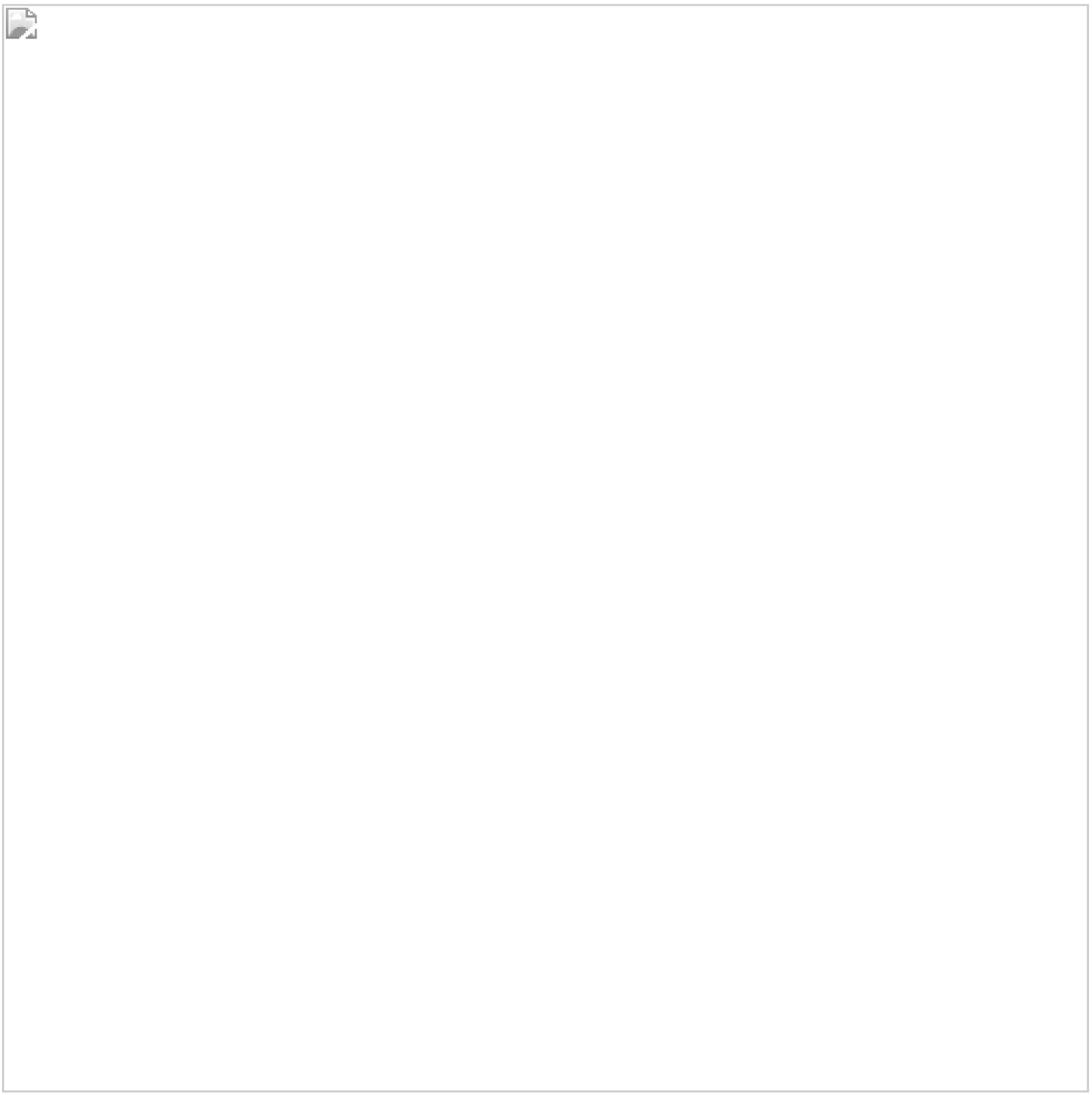


Think about it

1. What did the widow tell Ming-li to do first?

- ○ Eat and ask no questions
- ○ Go and thank the priest
- ○ Count the dumplings

Pride Invites Sorrow



Now began a long time of perfect happiness. Mother, son, dog and cat all enjoyed themselves. Bird-nest soup, shark's fins, and a hundred other foods were theirs for the asking. Ming-li got back all his strength, but, the story says, he grew somewhat lazy too, for he no longer had to work. The two animals became fat and sleek.

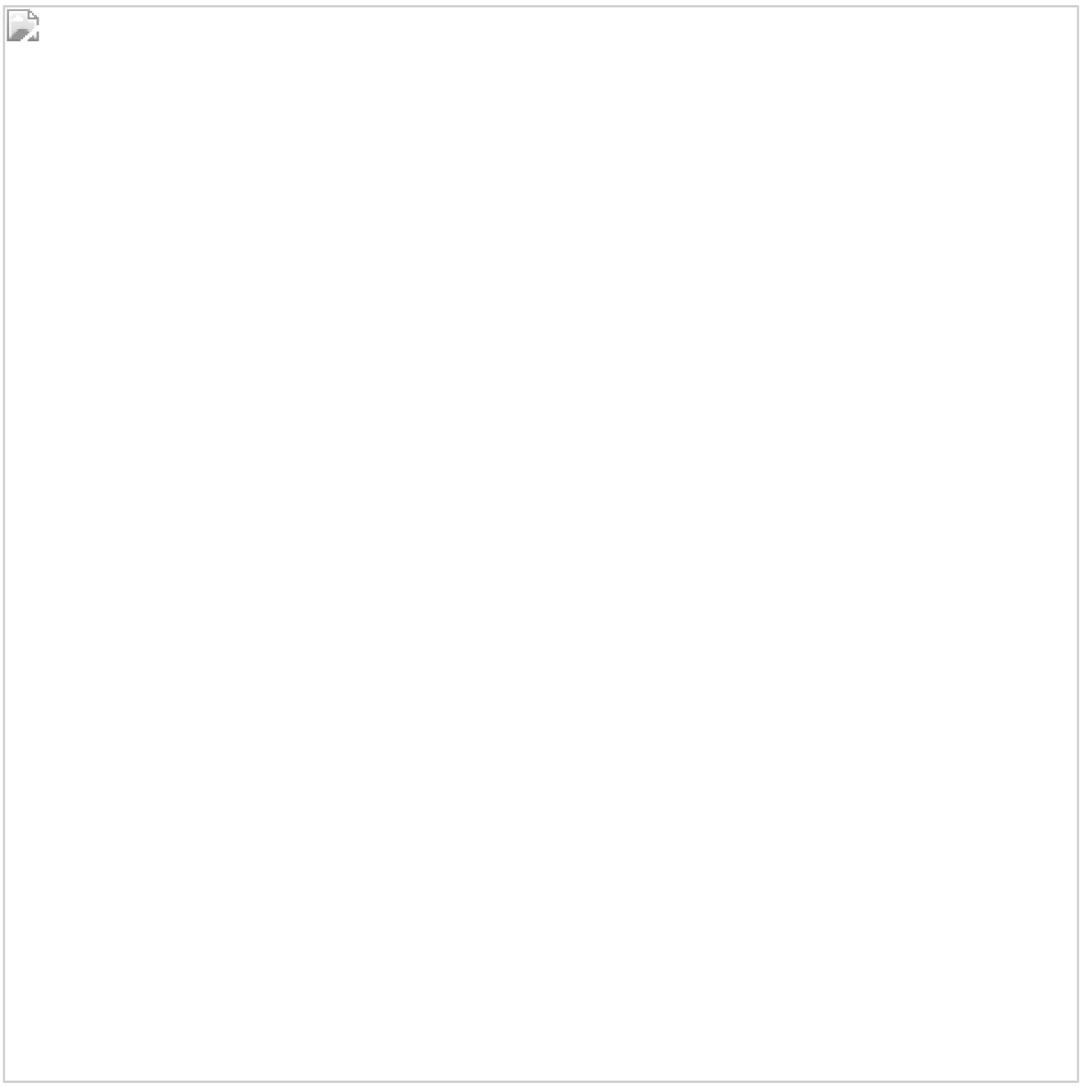
But according to a Chinese proverb, pride invites sorrow. The little family began to ask friends and relatives to dinner to show off their good meals.

One day a Mr. and Mrs. Chu came from a distant village. They had expected a beggar's meal, but went away with full stomachs.

TALK ABOUT IT

The Wangs wanted to show off. Why do you think people like to show off?

Pride Invites Sorrow · another picture

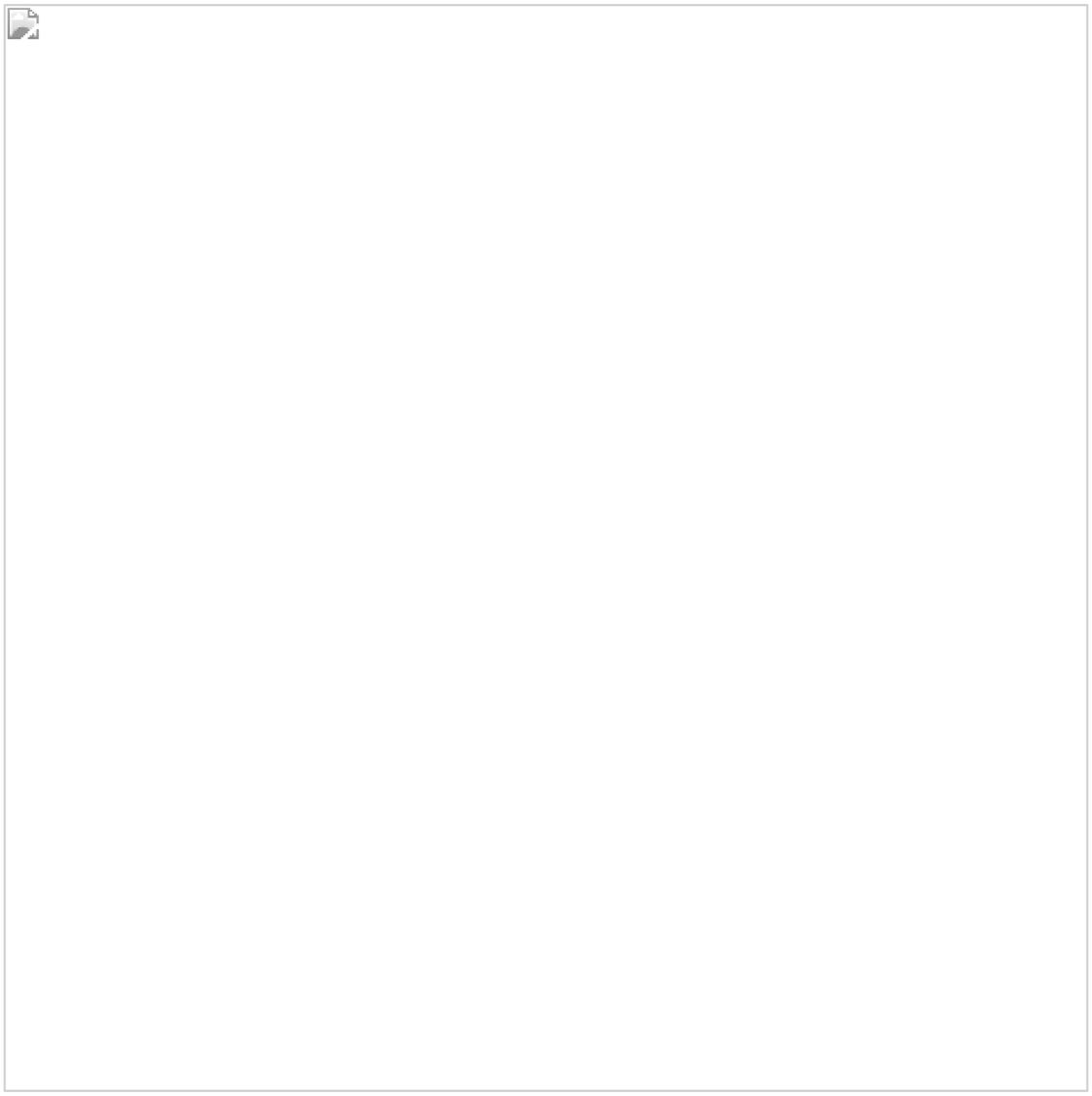


Think about it

1. What did the Wangs begin to do?

- ○ Sell dumplings
- ○ Invite friends to dinner to show off
- ○ Move to a new house

Mr. and Mrs. Chu



On the way home Mrs. Chu said, “I saw Widow Wang take a little gold ornament out of the pot and hide it in a cupboard. It must be some sort of charm.” Mr. Chu said, “Why is it that other people have all the luck?”

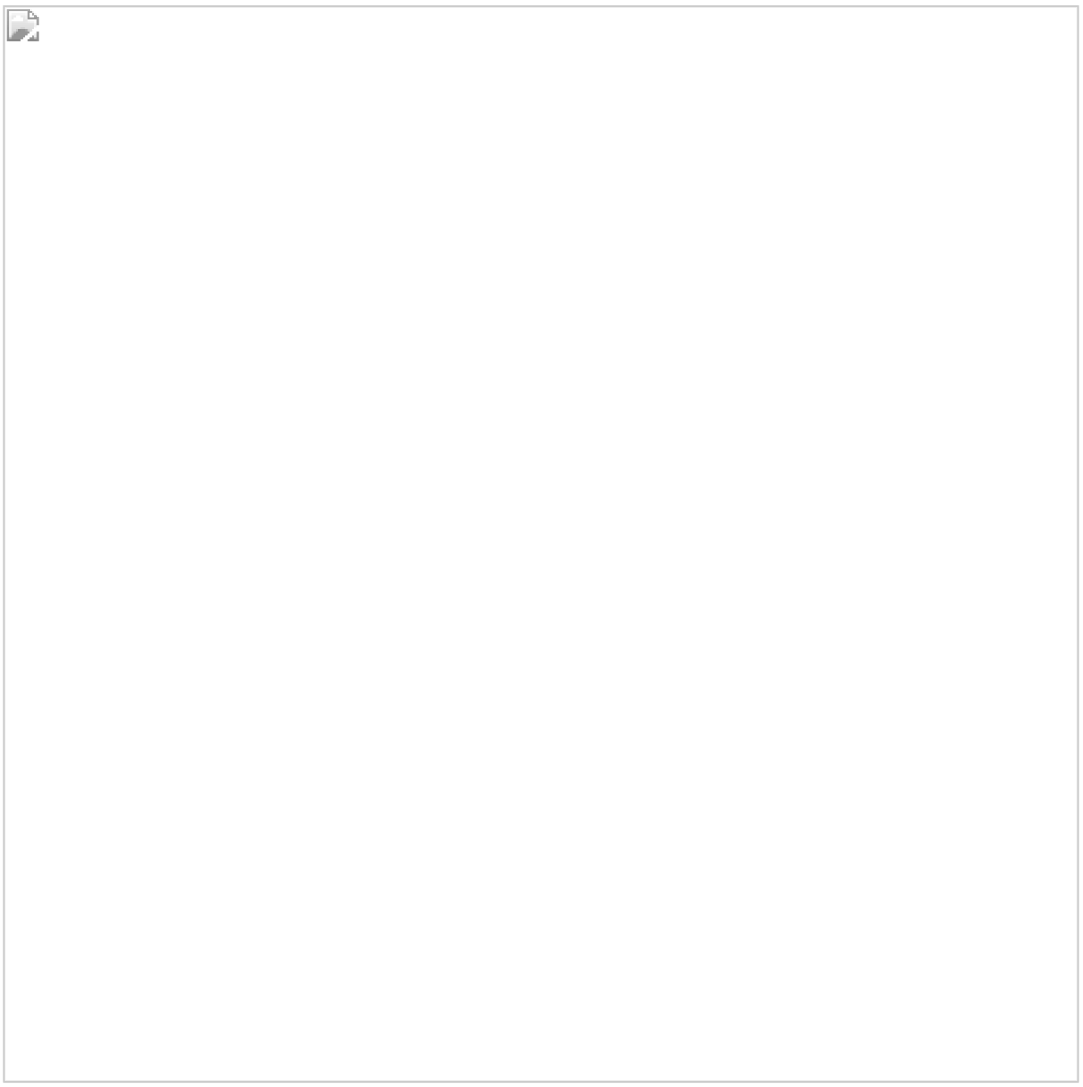
The Wangs were off to the Temple fair. “I will slip back then and borrow the little charm.”

“We must remember we're borrowing the thing, not stealing it,” said Mr. Chu, “for the Wangs have always been good friends to us, and then, too, we have just dined with them.”

So Mrs. Chu slipped in and took the beetle.

TALK ABOUT IT
The Chus called it “borrowing.” What do you think? Is it borrowing if you do not ask?

Mr. and Mrs. Chu · another picture



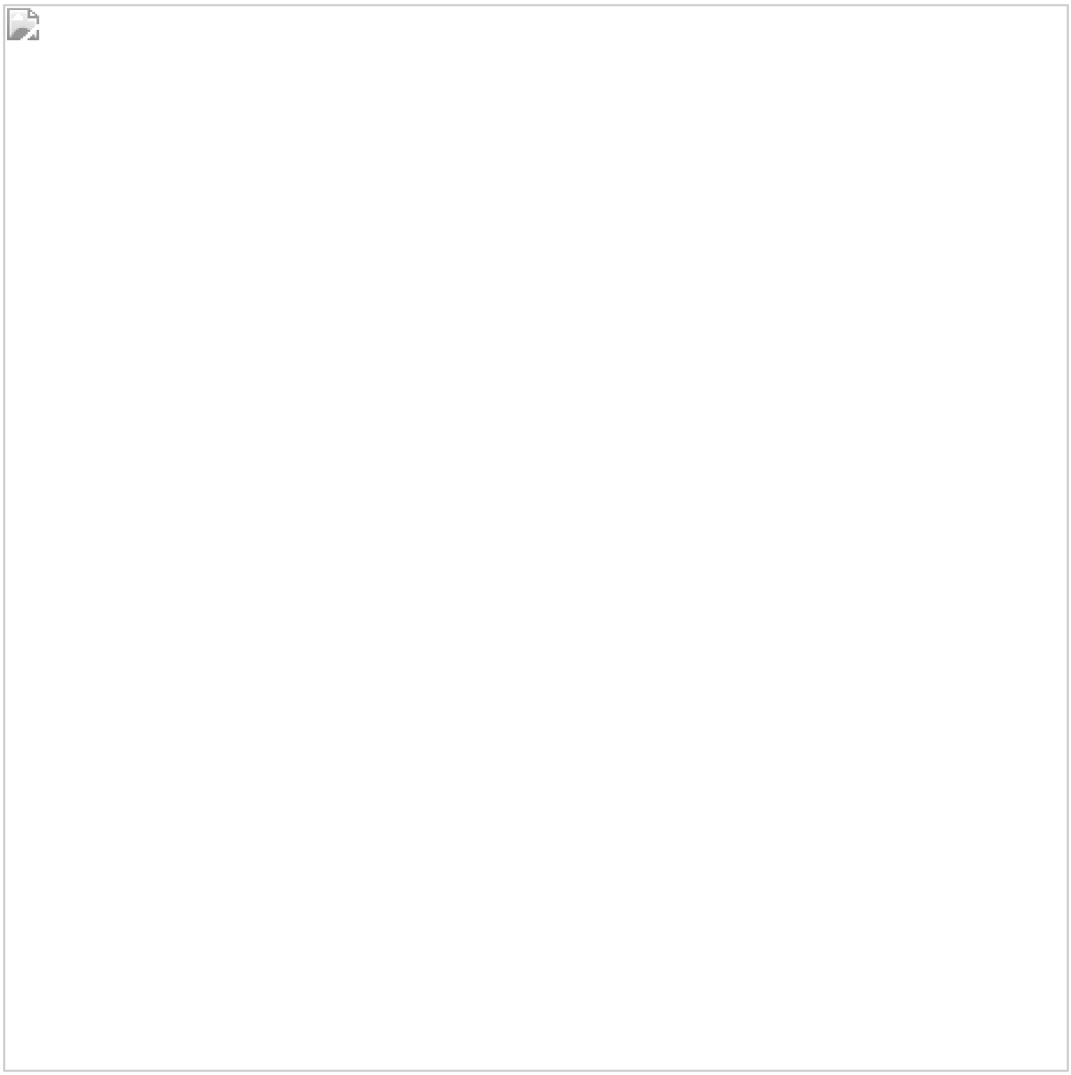
Think about it

1. Where were the Wangs when Mrs. Chu came back?

- ○ At the Temple fair
- ○ At the river
- ○ In the cupboard

2. Mr. Chu said they had "just dined with them." Why does that matter?

The Beetle Is Gone



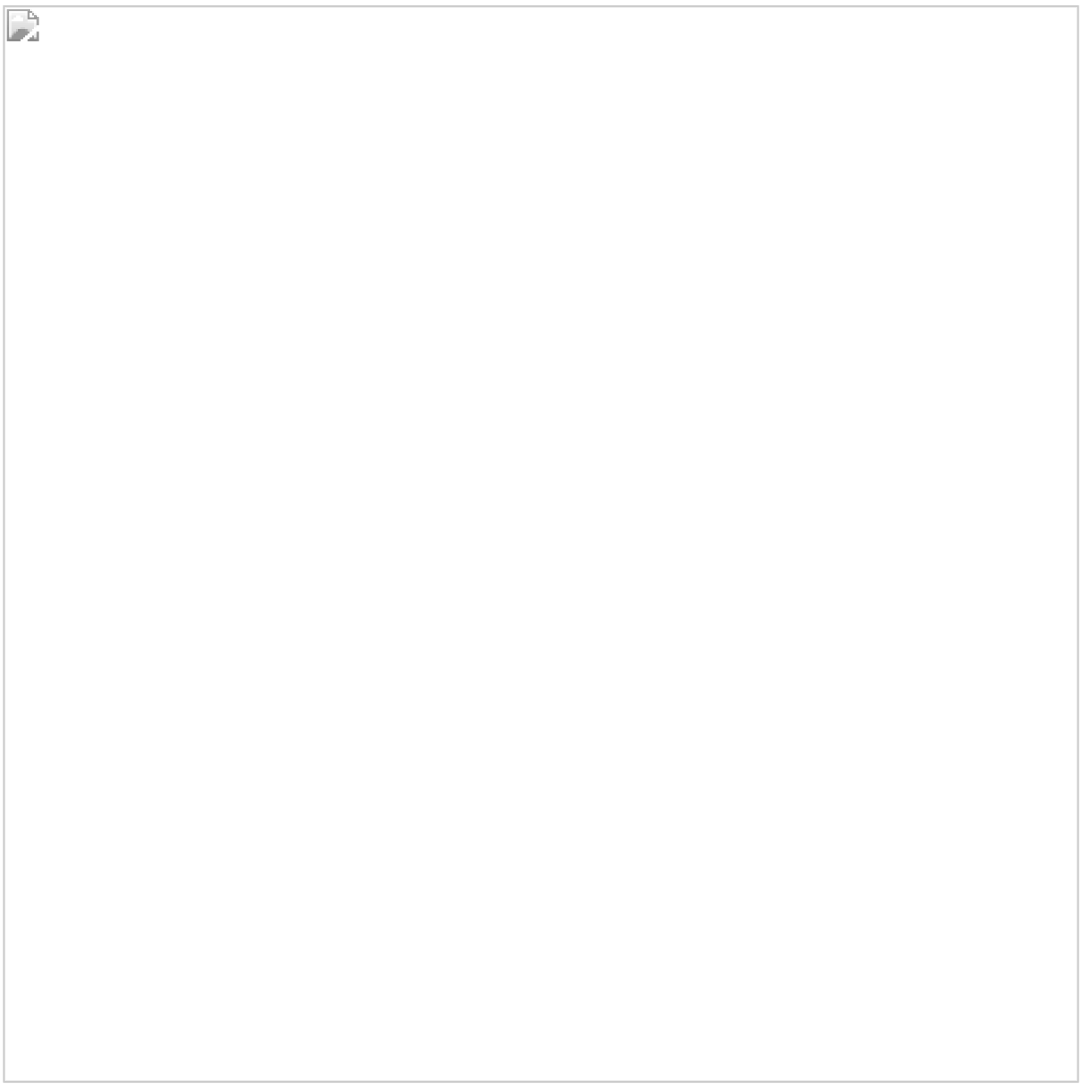
Great was the weeping when the widow came home from the fair and found her treasure missing. She looked in the little box ten times before she could believe it was empty.

Then came days of hunger, harder to bear since the good days. The pets hunted the streets for stray bones.

One day Whitehead began suddenly to frisk about. “I know the cause of all our trouble,” she said. “Are you willing to help me bring good fortune back to our family?”

“Of course I am,” barked Blackfoot. “I will do anything you like if it will bring Dame Fortune back again.”

TALK ABOUT IT
Blackfoot and Whitehead wanted to help the family. Who do you help at home?

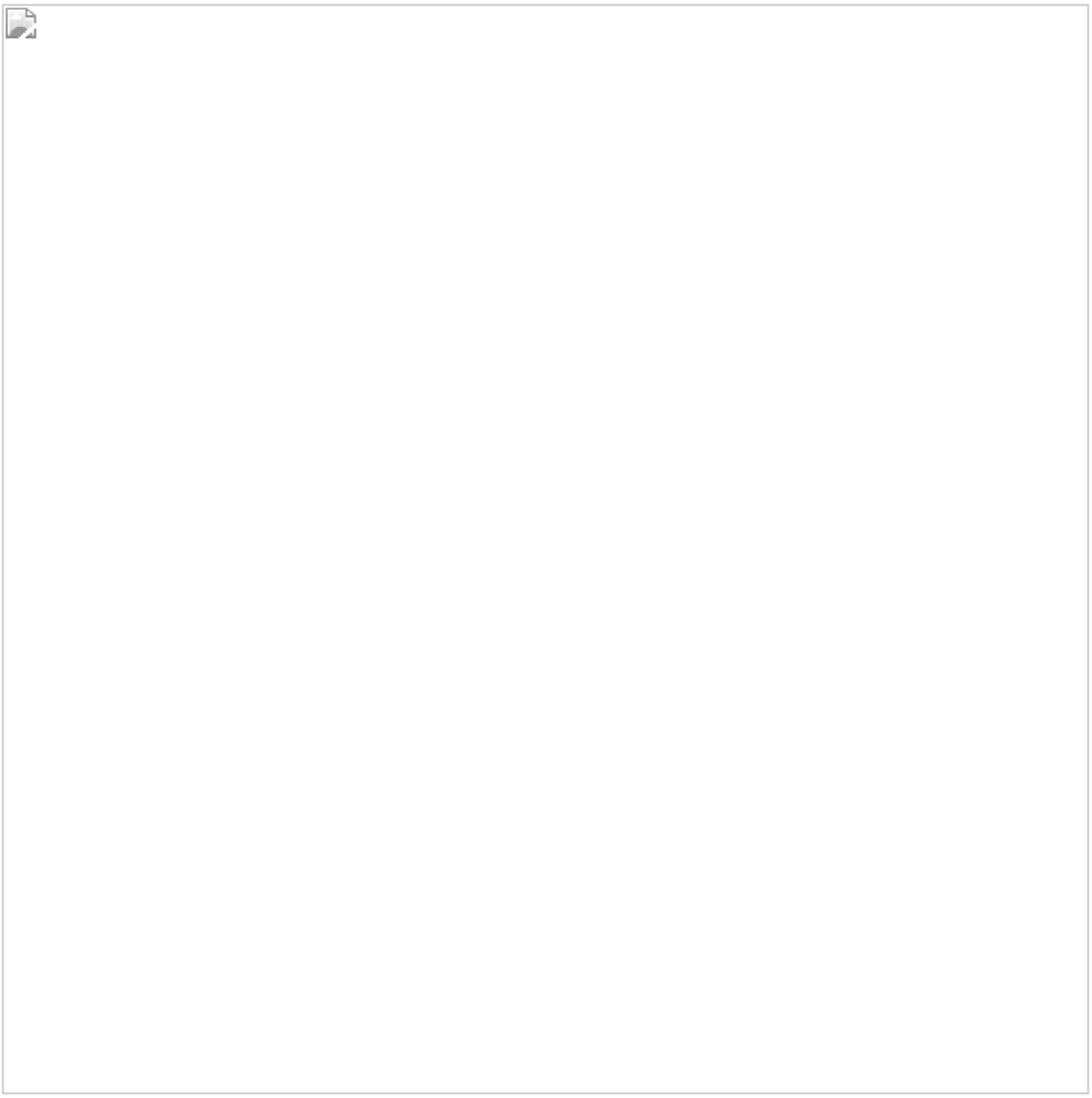


Think about it

1. Who guessed that someone had stolen the beetle?

- ○ Ming-li
- ○ Whitehead, the cat
- ○ The priest

Across the River



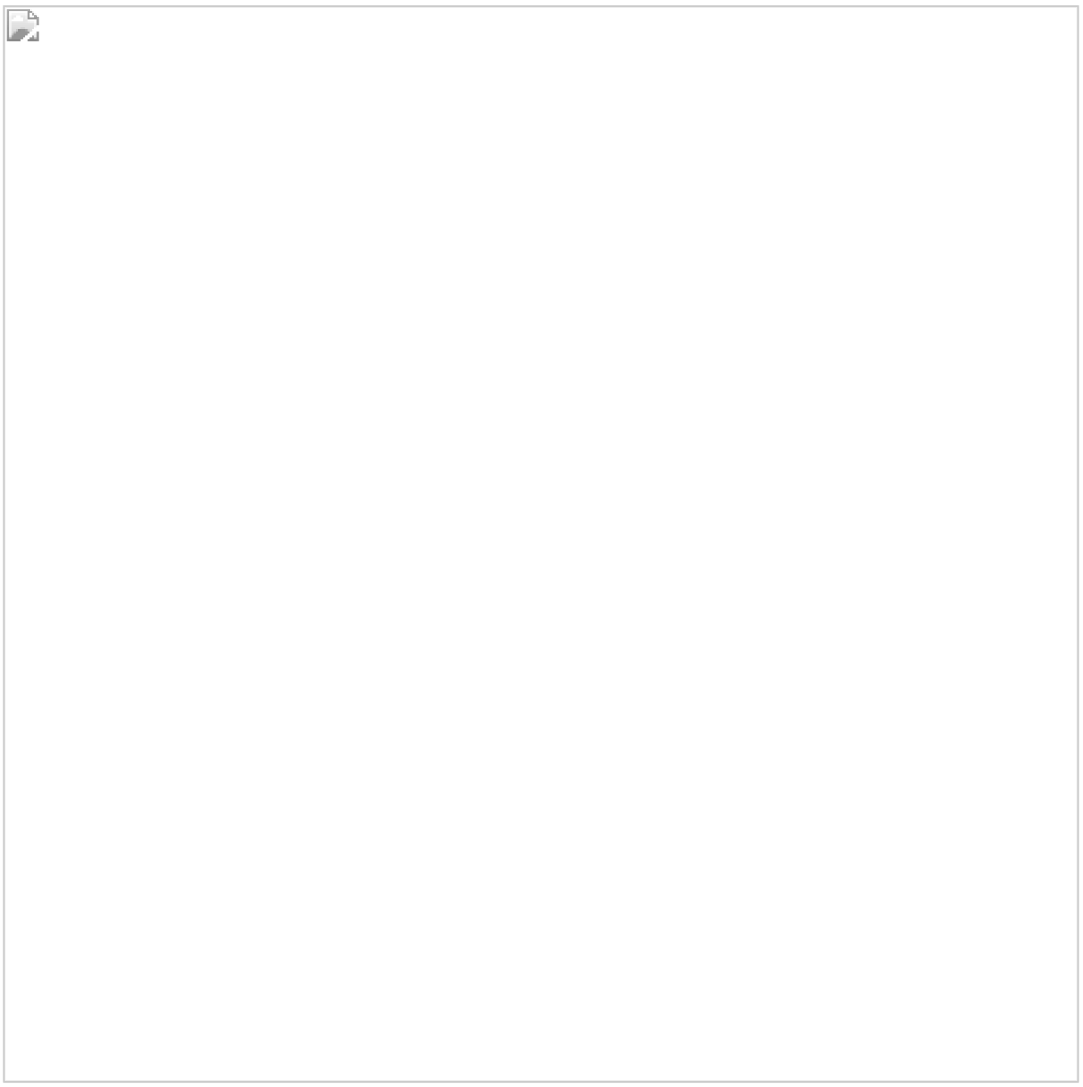
“We will go together,” said Whitehead. “I will ride on your back when we are fording the river. At the Chu house I will climb over the wall and manage the rest myself. You must wait outside to help me get home with the prize.”

That night they set out. Blackfoot enjoyed the swim, while the cat did not get a drop of water on her face. At midnight they reached the Chu house.

“Alas, that I am not a cat!” moaned Blackfoot. “If I were like you I could scale the wall.” With a mighty spring Whitehead reached the top of the mud wall and jumped down inside.

TALK ABOUT IT

Blackfoot and Whitehead each did the part they could do. What is a part you could do on a team?

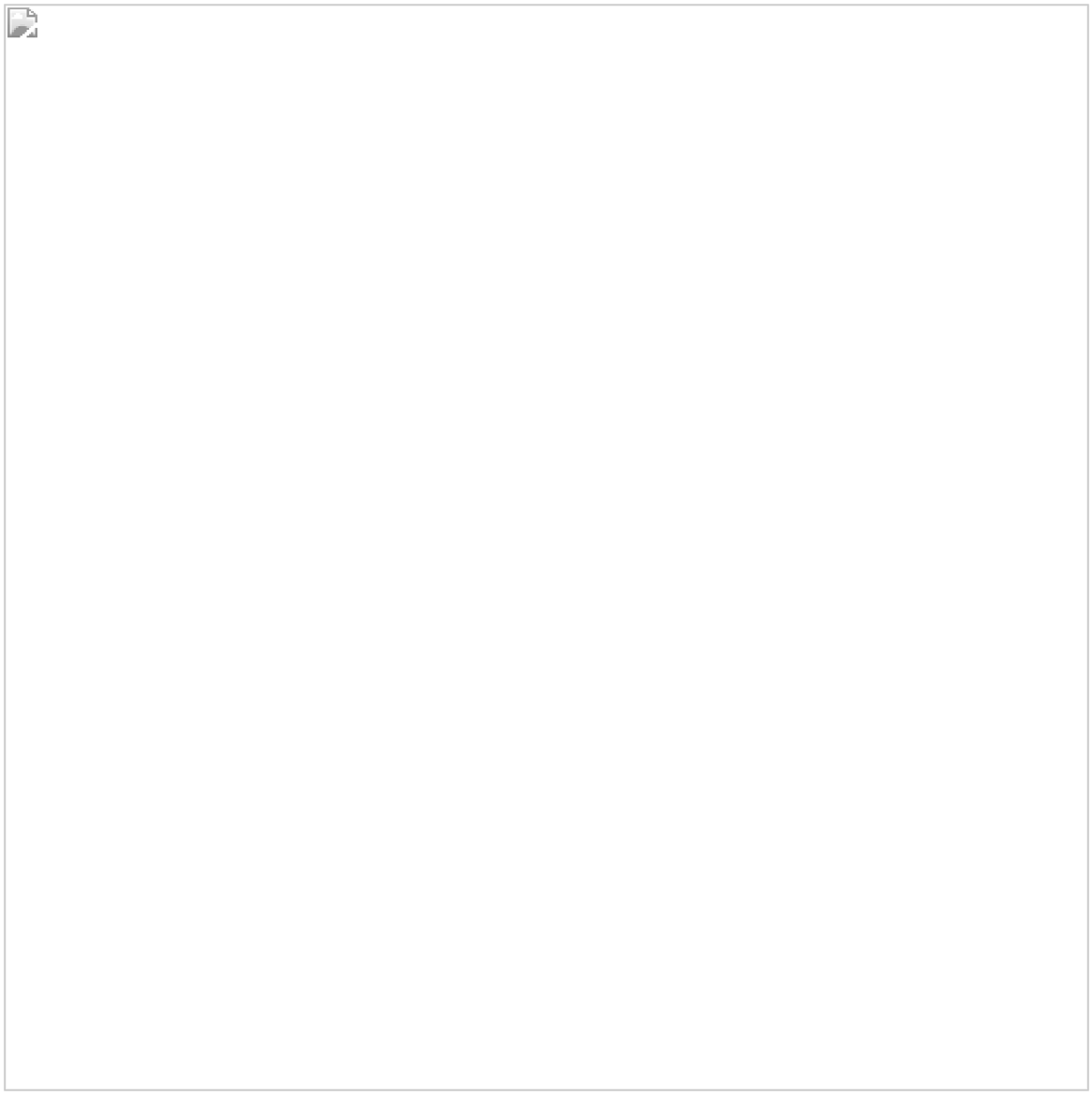


Think about it

1. Why did Whitehead climb the wall alone?

- ○ Blackfoot was asleep
- ○ Blackfoot could not get over the wall
- ○ The wall had a door

The Honourable Rat



In the shadow Whitehead caught a rat. “Don't you know it is the custom now to put prisoners on their honour?” it said. “I will promise not to run away.”

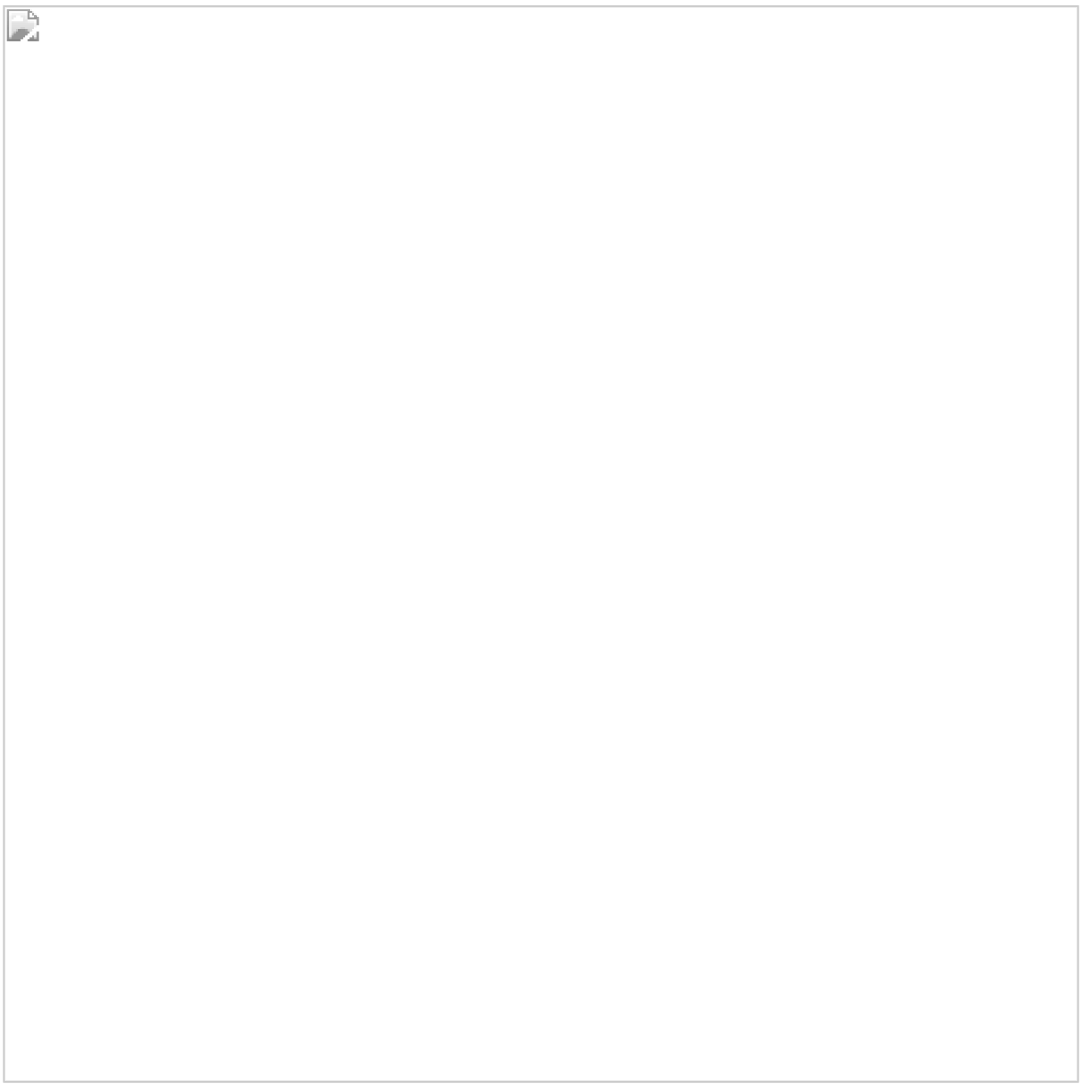
“Pooh! what honour has a rat?” said the cat. “My family was brought up under the roof of Confucius,” said the rat.

Its mistress, it said, had a fairy's charm. “She stole it from our place,” said the cat. “You get that golden trinket back for me, and I will set you free.”

Five minutes later the rat brought the beetle in its mouth and was gone for ever. Its honour was safe.

TALK ABOUT IT

The rat kept his word, even though he could have run. What do you think about that?

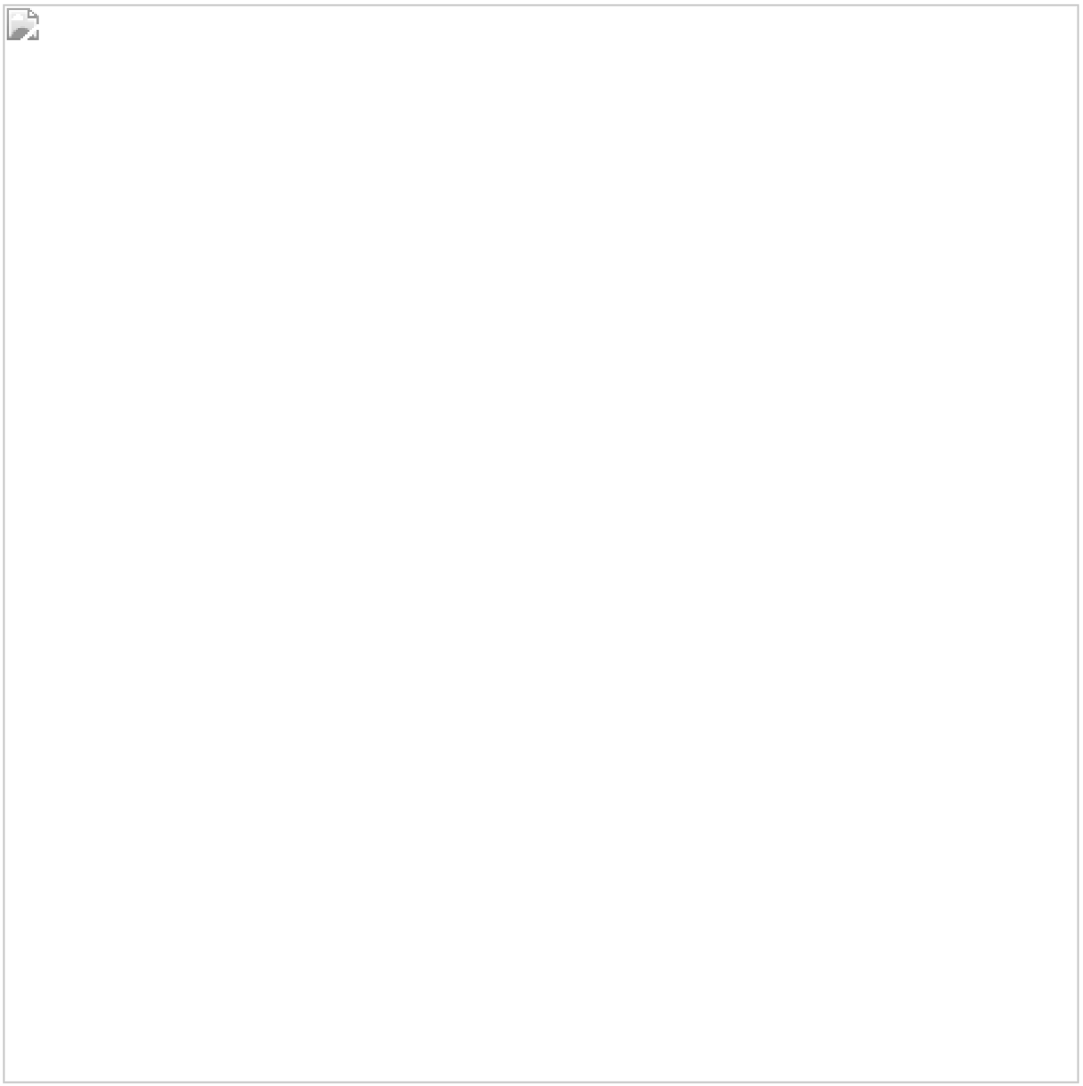


Think about it

1. What did the rat promise?

- ○ To obey the cat and not run away
- ○ To lead her home
- ○ To bring her a fish

The Fish and the Frog



The two reached the river as the sun rose. “Be careful,” said Blackfoot as the cat leaped onto his back, “it is necessary to keep your mouth closed till we reach the other side.”

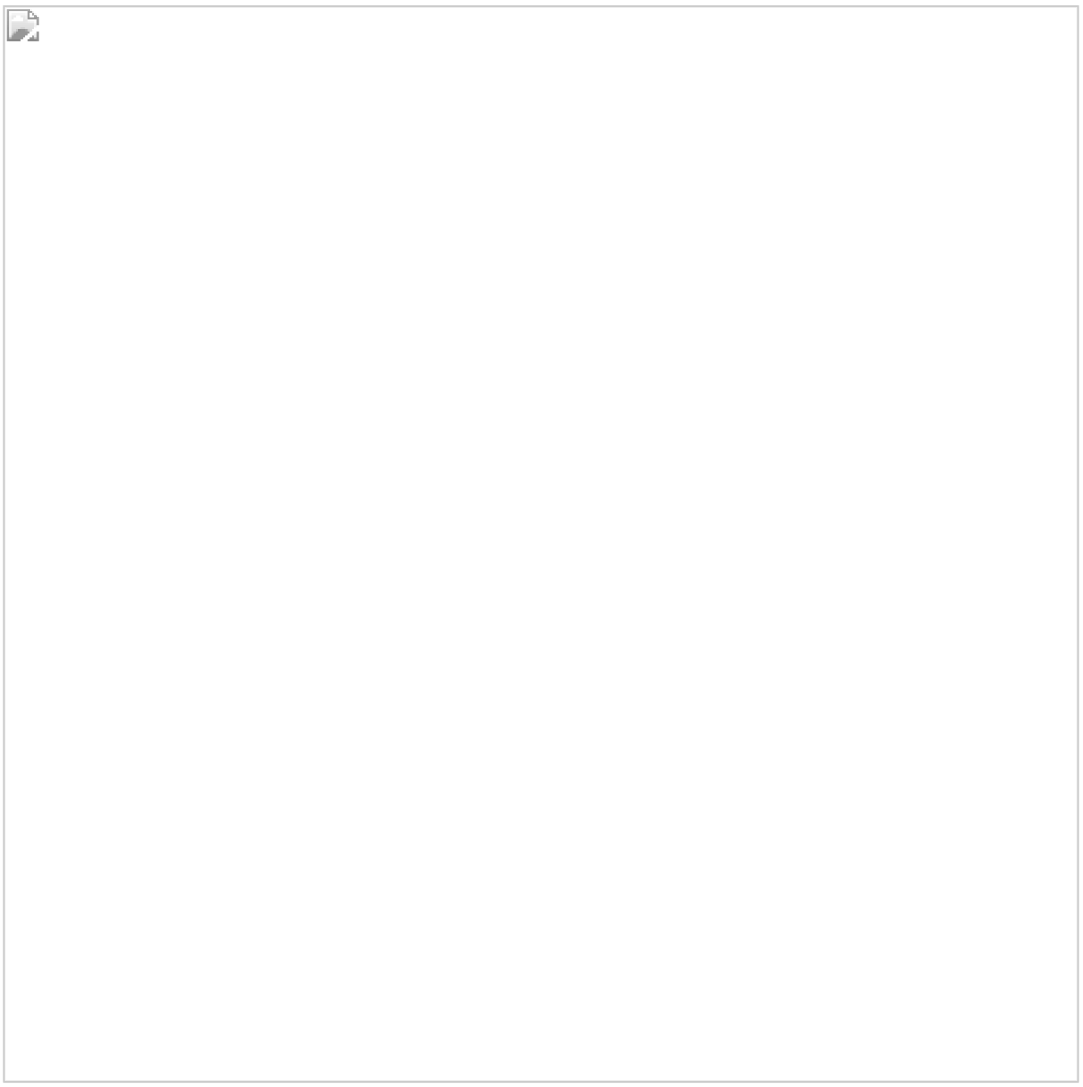
But near the farther shore a fish leaped out right under the cat's nose. Snap! went her jaws, and the golden beetle sank to the bottom of the river.

“There!” said the dog angrily. “Now all our trouble has been in vain.” They called each other some very bad names.

Then a friendly frog who had heard them offered to fetch the treasure from the bottom. They thanked him and turned for home.

TALK ABOUT IT

Whitehead snapped at the fish and dropped the beetle. Have you ever lost something by getting distracted?

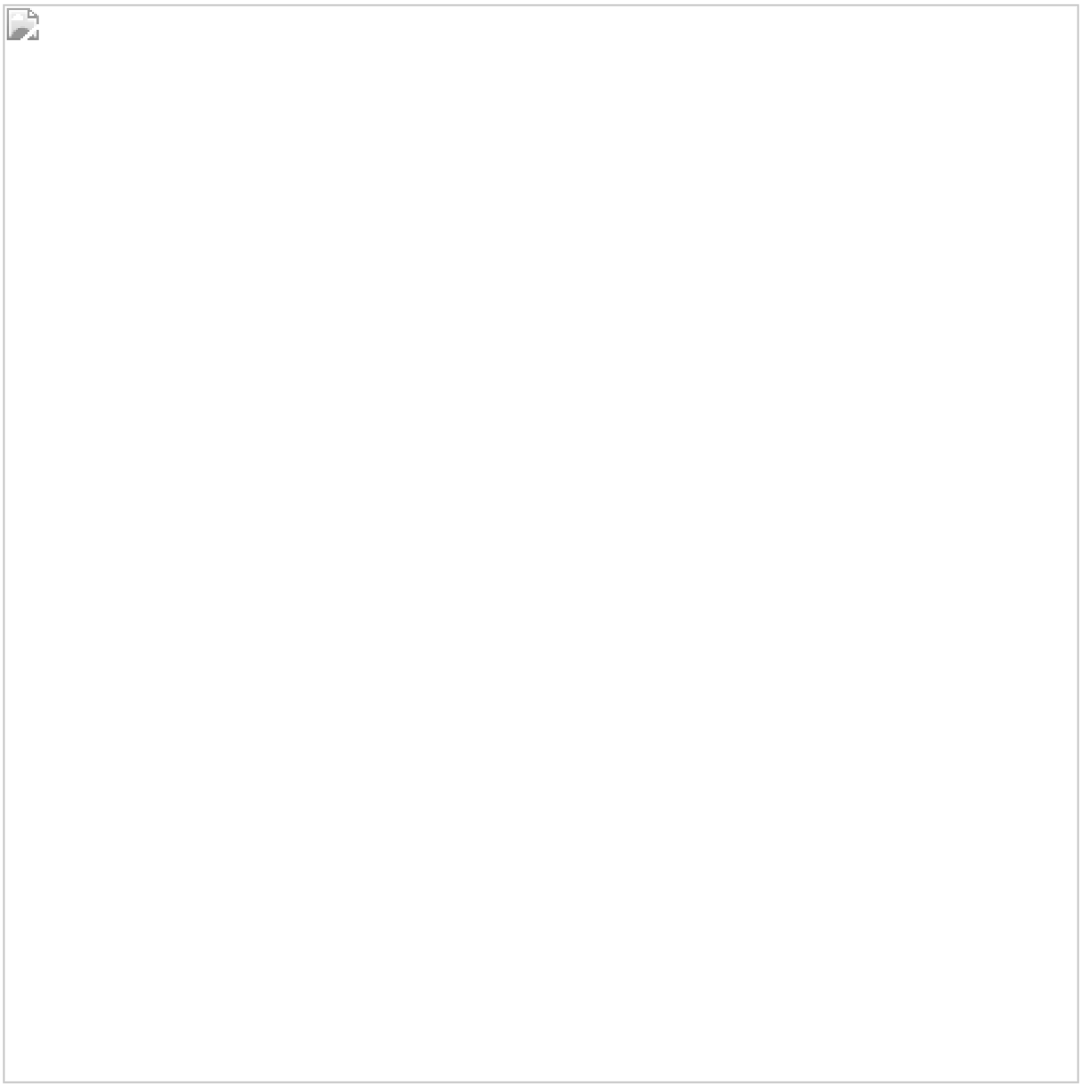


Think about it

1. Who got the beetle out of the river?

- ○ Blackfoot
- ○ A friendly frog
- ○ A fisherman

Home Again



The door was shut, and Blackfoot could not get anyone to open it.

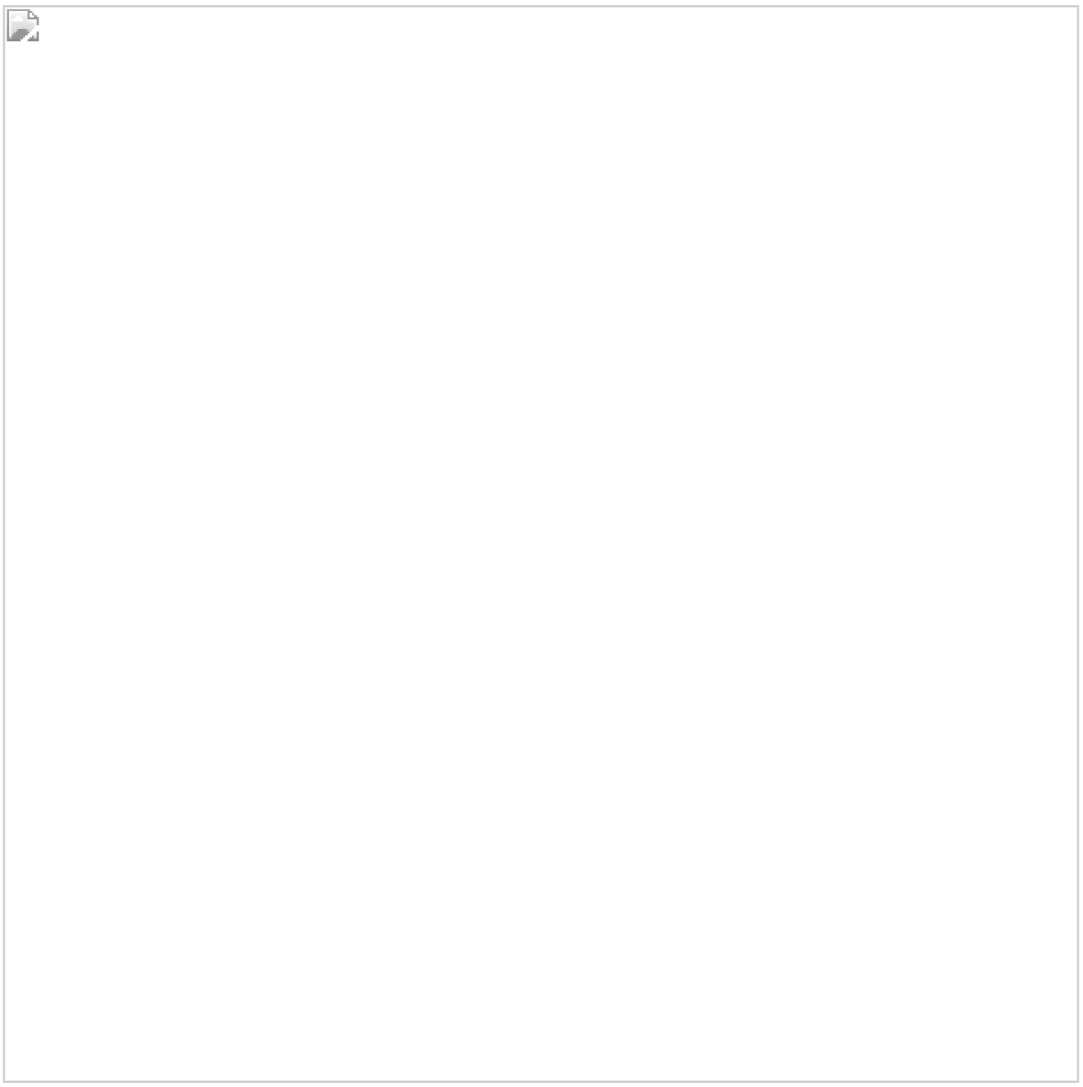
Whitehead sprang through a hole in the paper window, too small and high for the dog. Inside, the son lay too weak to speak, and his mother rocked back and forth, crying.

“Here I am, mistress,” cried Whitehead, “and here is the treasure you are weeping for. I have rescued it and brought it back to you.”

“Breakfast, son, breakfast!” cried the widow. They heaped praises on Whitehead and filled her platter. But never a word did they say of the faithful dog outside, for the cat had said nothing of Blackfoot's part.

TALK ABOUT IT

Whitehead let the family think she had done it all herself. What do you think she should have said?

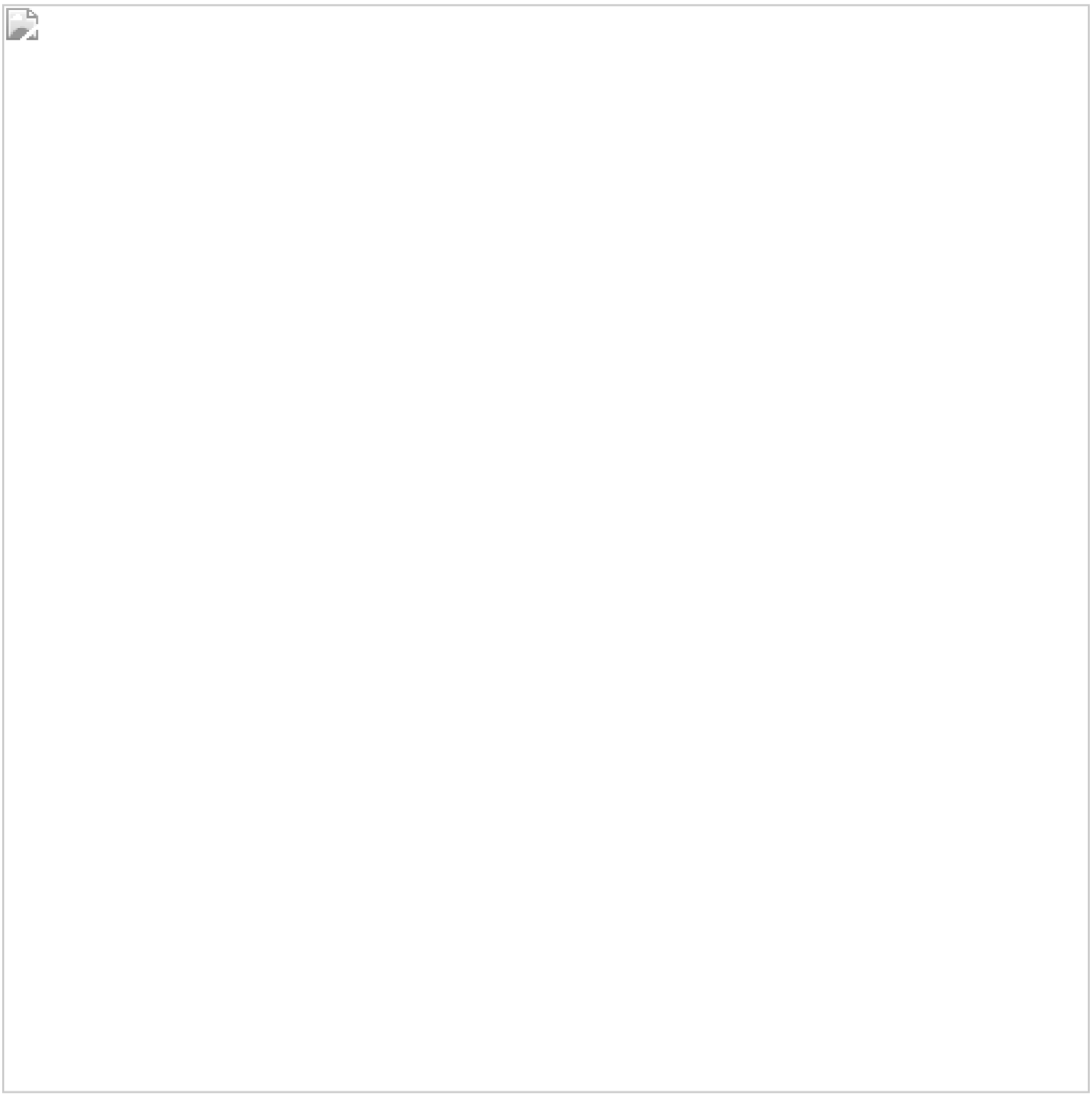


Think about it

1. Why did no one thank Blackfoot?

- ○ He ran away
- ○ The cat did not tell them he helped
- ○ He was asleep

Why the Dog Hates the Cat



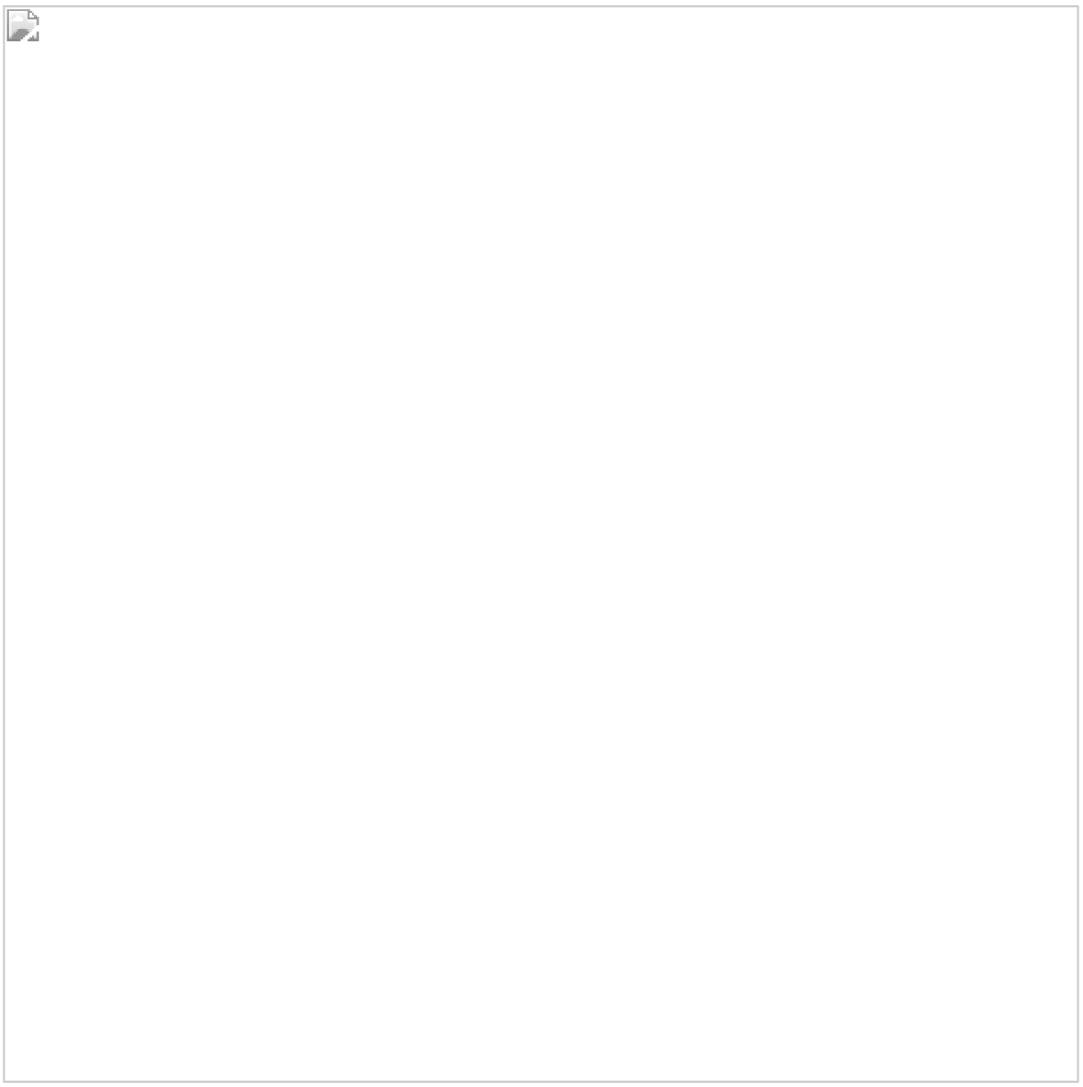
After breakfast Whitehead slipped out. “Oh, my dear Blackfoot,” she began laughingly, “you should have been inside to see what a feast they gave me! Too bad, old fellow, that you are hungry. You'd better run out into the street and hunt up a bone.”

Maddened by her treachery, the dog sprang upon the cat, and that was the end of her. “So dies the one who forgets a friend and who loses honour,” he cried sadly.

He told his tribe what Whitehead had done. And that is why the children and grandchildren of Blackfoot have fought the children and grandchildren of Whitehead for a thousand generations of dogs.

TALK ABOUT IT

What do you think of how Whitehead treated Blackfoot? And what do you think of what Blackfoot did?



Think about it

1. What does the story say is the reason dogs and cats fight?

- ○ The cat forgot her friend, the dog
- ○ The dog stole the beetle
- ○ The frog told a lie

2. Who in this story did something kind, and who did something unkind?

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

— Yeshua HaMashiach

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