



The Three Sisters

By Paul Yee

Illustrated by Shaoli Wang

The Three Sisters

To my student Celine Yeh. - SW

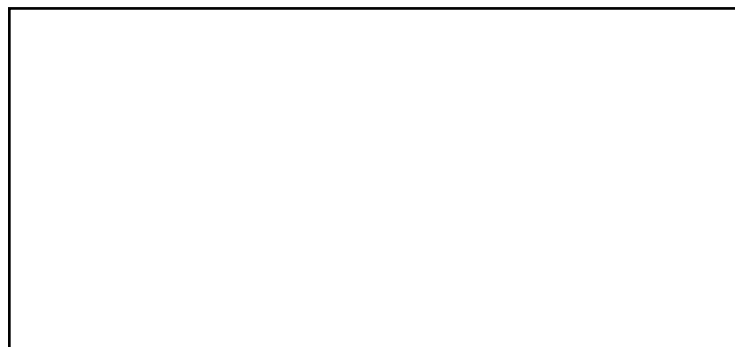
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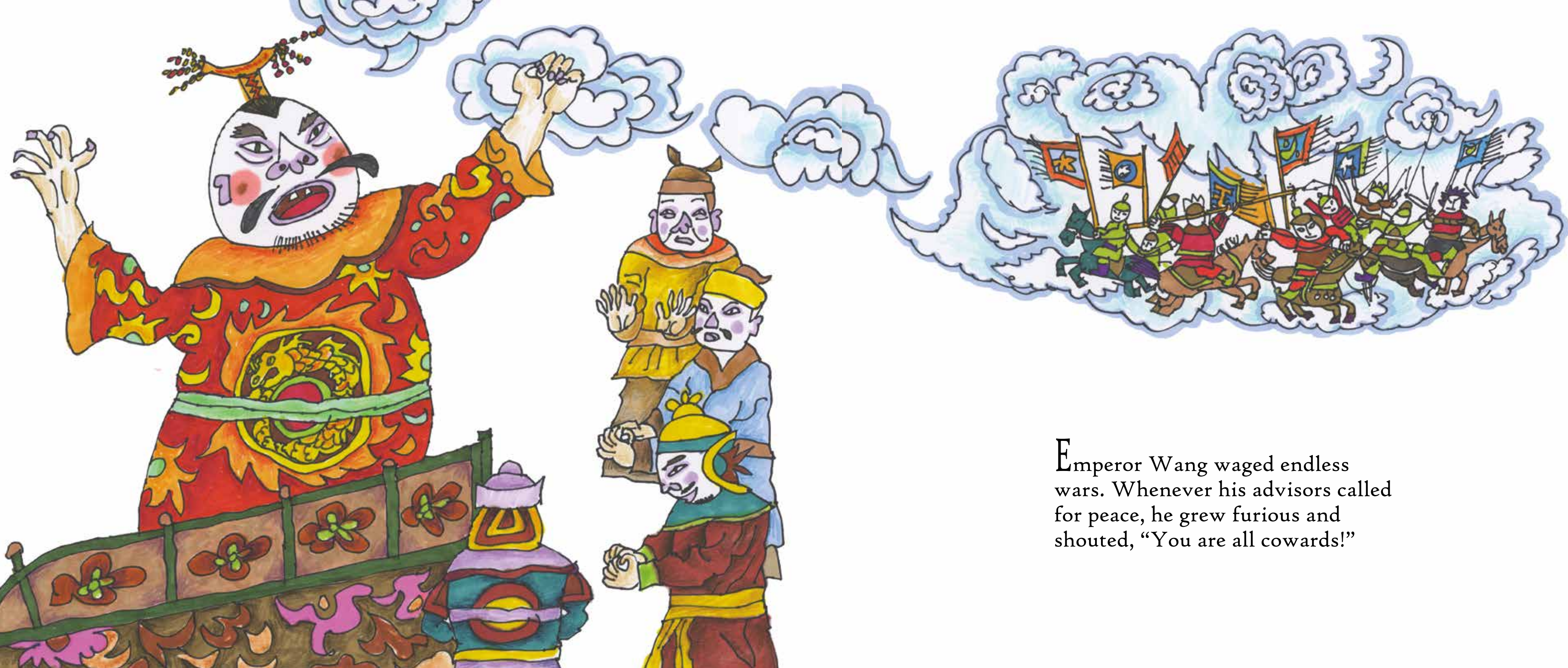


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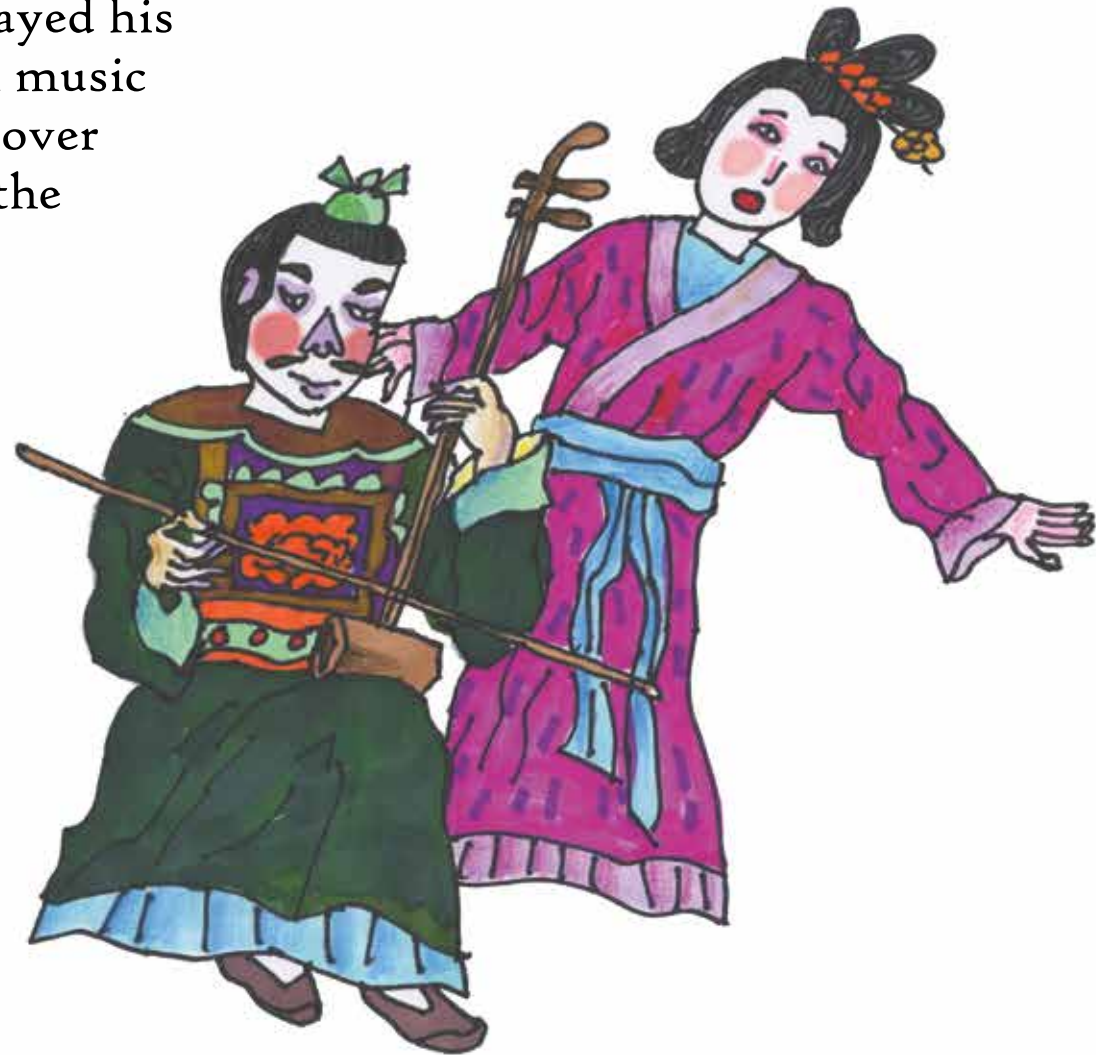
VANCOUVER LONDON



Emperor Wang waged endless wars. Whenever his advisors called for peace, he grew furious and shouted, "You are all cowards!"

To calm him, his advisors always summoned his court musicians, Lady Li and Master Yen.

Lady Li sang beautifully while Master Yen played his erhu. Their beautiful music cast a powerful spell over the palace, soothing the emperor's anger.





Lady Li and Master Yen had three daughters—all talented musicians. When they practiced in the garden, the horses shook their manes and listened intently to their music.

One day, after Lady Li and Master Yen had performed, the emperor said, "Bring your daughters to play for me."

"Highness, they are not ready," Master Yen replied. "They are still young."



The Emperor was angry at Master Yen for disobeying him. So the next morning, he sent a messenger to Master Yen's house.

Knocking boldly at their door, he shouted, "Bring your erhu and your horse, Master Yen. You have orders to go to the north and play for our army there."

So Master Yen bid his family farewell.

"Don't worry," he said, hugging each of his daughters. "Stay true to music, and you will see its power and its magic."



When next Lady Li sang at the palace, the Emperor again said to call her daughters.

“Highness, they are not ready,” she replied.
“They are still learning.”

“Nonsense!” snapped the Emperor. “They must come now; otherwise your husband will never return.”

So Lady Li sent for First Sister.



At the palace, First Sister's flute filled the hall with music that spoke of high mountains, bamboo groves, and orange sunsets. Her notes rang true.

But when she and her mother tried to leave, armed guards blocked them.

"Play another song!" declared the Emperor.

Then first sister remembered what her father had told her.

Stay true to music, and you will see its power and its magic.

On the palace walls, paintings featured birds, big and small.

First Sister lifted her flute and played.

Sweet sounds of chirping turned first to hoots, and then to shrieks and cries, as crows and sparrow hawks, owls and comorants flew off their scrolls, and pecked at the eyes of the guards.

Amidst their frightened cries, First Sister escaped.

The emperor glared at Lady Li. "Call another daughter, or I will send you all into exile."



Second Sister's gu-zheng music evoked sea tides rising and falling, and fishing boats fighting the waves. All her notes were full and strong.

But, when she and her mother went to leave, armed guards blocked them.

"I command you to stay," declared the Emperor. "Play another song!"

Then second sister remembered what her father had told her.

Stay true to music, and you will see its power and its magic.

On the walls, the paintings depicted cascading waterfalls.

Second Sister's fingers danced over the strings, which played sounds like high winds and crashing waves. Water surged from the scrolls and swept away the guards.

Second Sister escaped, but not her mother.

The emperor glared at Lady Li. "Call for your youngest daughter," he said. "Otherwise, I will exile your family to the four corners of the kingdom. You will never see each other again."

Servants removed all paintings from the hall.



Third Sister's pipa evoked raindrops, the northern plains, and butterflies. Her notes danced high and low.

The Emperor sighed with contentment. But, when Third Sister and her mother went to leave, armed guards blocked them.

"What will you do now?" The emperor laughed. "My walls have been stripped of their paintings!"

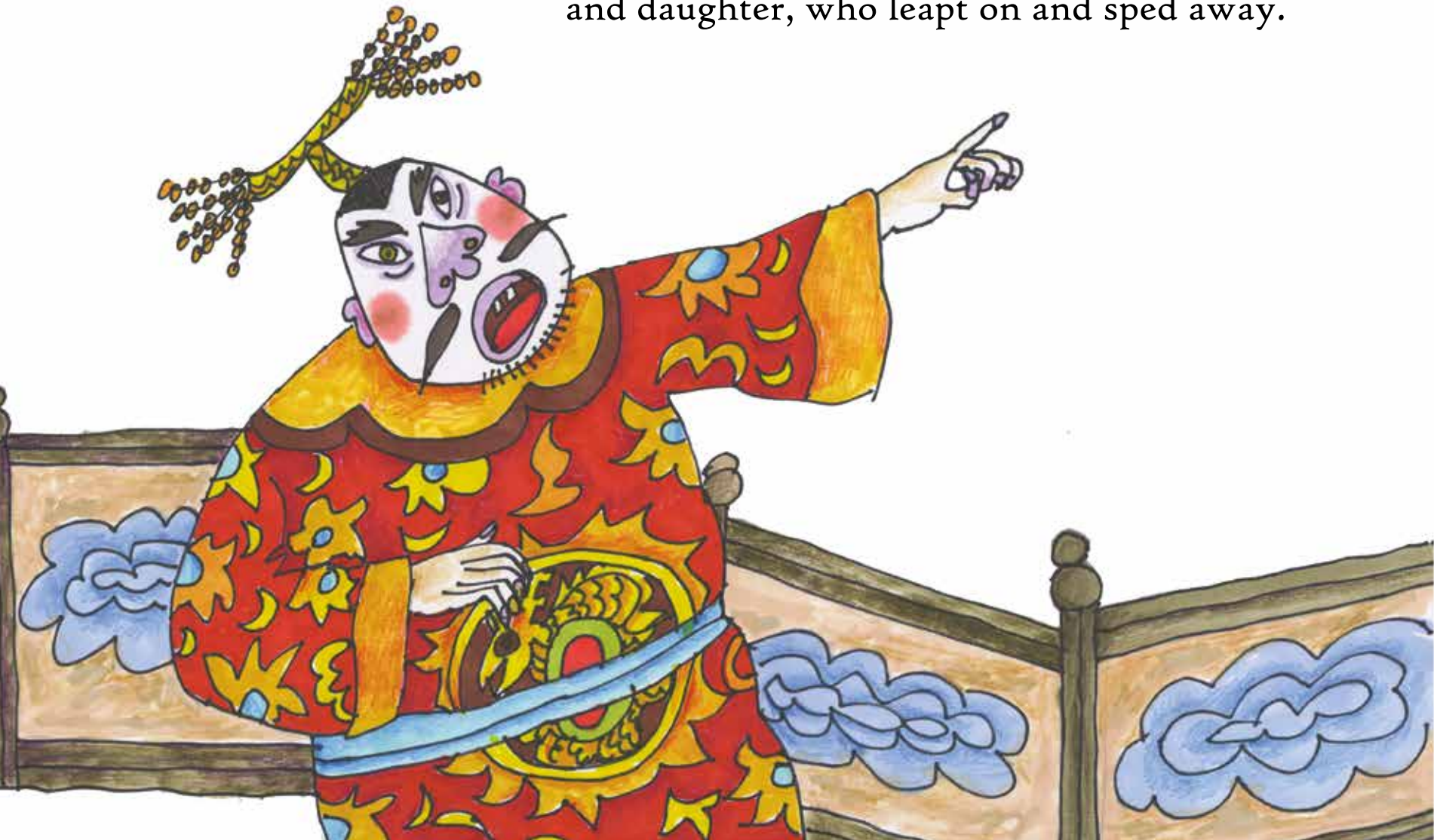
Third sister remembered what her father had told her.

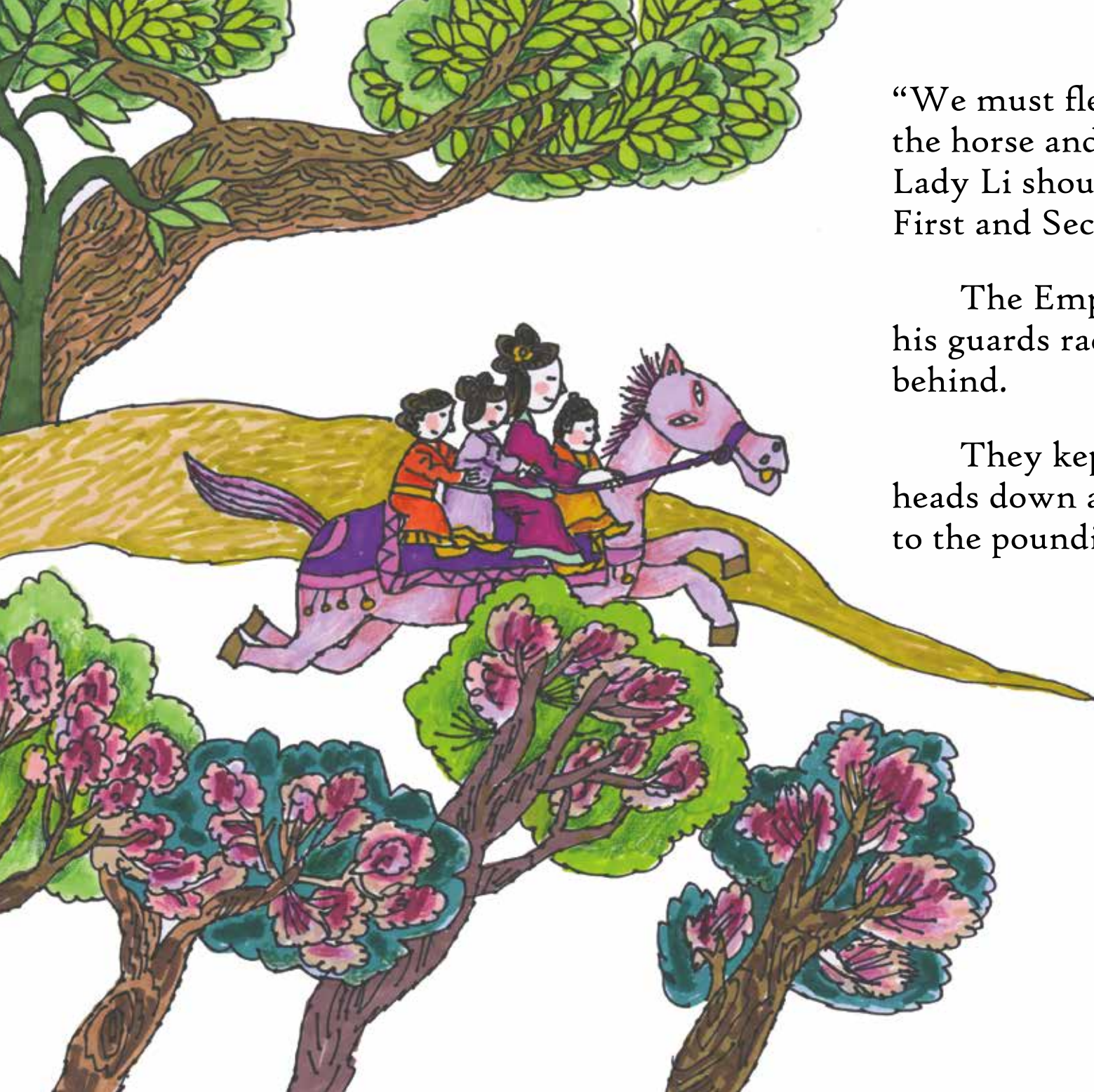
Stay true to music, and you will see its power and its magic.



Third Sister played a song where wild horses whinnied and galloped, while Lady Li sang.

Soon a loud clattering resounded on the stone stairs, and a stallion ran up to mother and daughter, who leapt on and sped away.

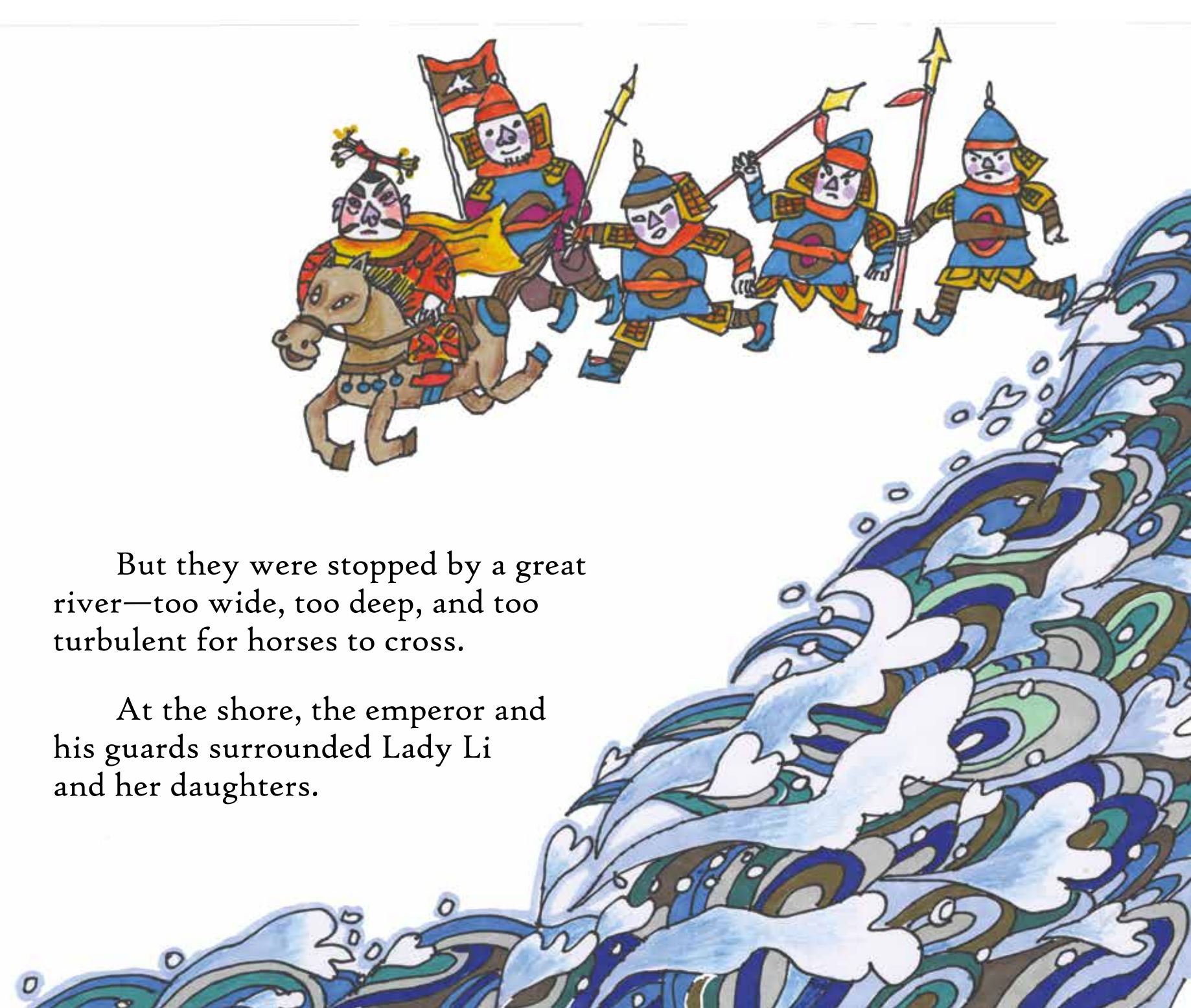




“We must flee! Mount the horse and let’s go!” Lady Li shouted to First and Second Sister.

The Emperor and his guards raced close behind.

They kept their heads down and clung to the pounding horse.



But they were stopped by a great river—too wide, too deep, and too turbulent for horses to cross.

At the shore, the emperor and his guards surrounded Lady Li and her daughters.



First Sister used her flute to call an eagle from the clouds.

When Second Sister strummed her gu-zheng, a thick stream of water shot up and lifted the horse to the sky.

As Third Sister's pipa played, a dragon, with the head of a horse, the claws of an eagle, and the shiny scales of fish, dove from the sky.



When the dragon blew fire, the guards threw down their weapons, and the emperor bowed his head, kneeling down to the ground. At the sight of such magic, he vowed to bring peace and end all the wars.





In the north, word of how his daughters' music had stopped the wars brought a deep smile to Master Yen's face.

I'll soon be home, he thought.



Facing a tyrannical emperor bent on war, three sisters in China, sublimely gifted in music, fend for themselves and their parents with the power and magic they create with their instruments. Can the beauty of their music change the emperor's heart and bring peace?

Paul Yee is one of Canada's most celebrated authors for young people. He has won numerous prizes, including a Governor General's Award, and The Vicky Metcalf Award for Literature for Young People. He lives in Toronto.

Dao, China, **Shaoli Wang** now lives in British Columbia where she has taught art to children for 25 years. Shaoli is the illustrator of numerous books by Paul Yee, including the highly claimed *Bamboo*.



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KEY SELLING POINTS:

- Female role models.
- Well known author winner of the Governor General's Award, the Vicky Metcalf Award for his lifetime of experience from the Writers' Trust.
- Own voices.
- Original folktale about sisters who overpowers a tyrannical emperor.

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