



Chang-e and the Moon

嫦娥奔月

A traditional tale
from China,
retold by Cherie Wu



Part One: Hou Yi and the Sun Birds

Long, long ago, ten sun birds lived in a volcano. Each day, one of the birds would leave the volcano and fly up into the sky and around the world, bringing heat and light to all the land.

One day, the ten birds decided to go out on the same day. Ten sun birds in the sky made it ten times hotter on Earth. The land was scorched. The rivers and seas dried up. Animals and crops died in the fields. It felt like the world was about to catch fire.

Something had to be done quickly. The Emperor sent for a young man named Hou Yi, who was known to be a great archer. “Save us,” said the Emperor. “Shoot down the sun birds.”

Hou Yi took ten arrows and a huge bow, and he walked to the top of a hill. He shot down the sun birds one by one, until there was only one left in the sky. He let the last one go so that it would continue to give light and warmth to Earth.

“You have saved the world,” said the Emperor, and he rewarded Hou Yi richly.

Part Two: Hou Yi and the Elixir of Immortality

Hou Yi became known as a hero. Young men flocked to him. They wanted Hou Yi to teach them to be great archers, too.

The Queen of Heaven also saw what Hou Yi had done and wanted to reward him. She gave him the Elixir of Immortality and told him, “You deserve to live a long and happy life. If you drink half the elixir, you will live forever. If you drink all of it, you will ascend to Heaven.”

Time passed. Hou Yi married a beautiful girl named Chang-O. He told her about the elixir. “We will pick a good day,” he said, “and share the elixir so that we both become immortal. Then we can live a happy life together forever.”



Part Three: Chang-O and the Elixir of Immortality

But one of Hou Yi’s students, Feng Meng, overheard this conversation. Feng Meng wanted to become immortal, too.

One day when Hou Yi was out hunting and Chang-O had gone to the market, Feng Meng sneaked into their house. He wanted to steal the elixir for himself, but Chang-O arrived back from the market before he could find it.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

“I want the elixir,” Feng Meng shouted. “Where is it?”

Chang-O refused to tell him, but she knew Feng Meng would soon find it. She rushed to the cupboard where it was hidden, grabbed the bottle, and ran for the door. But she was not quick enough – Feng Meng stood in the way.

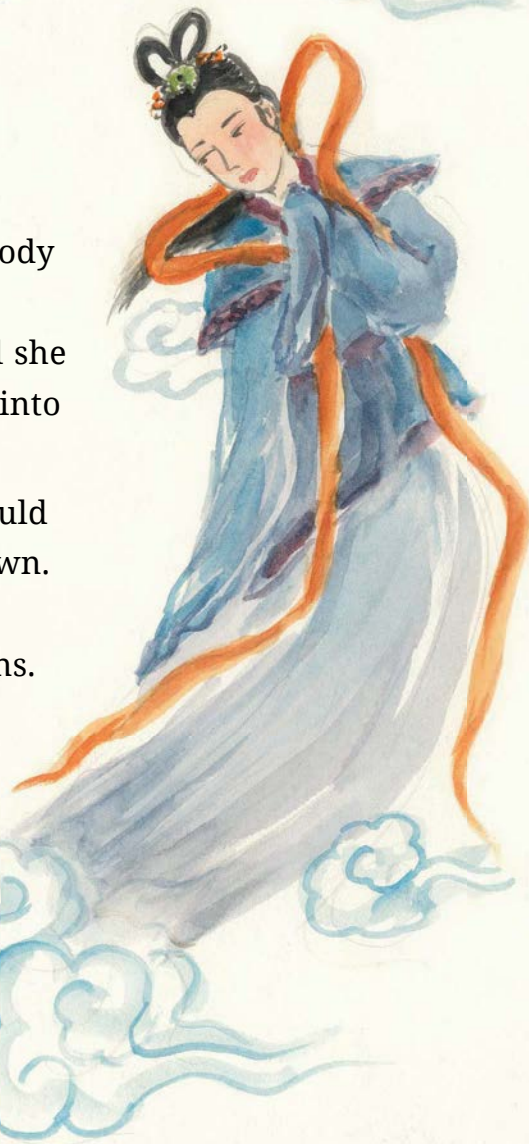
Feng Meng was a strong man. Chang-O knew that she could not escape, so to stop him from stealing the elixir, she drank it all herself.



Part Four: Chang-O Ascends to Heaven

The moment she swallowed the magic drink, Chang-O felt her body start to change. She felt herself become lighter and lighter until she floated out the window and up into the sky.

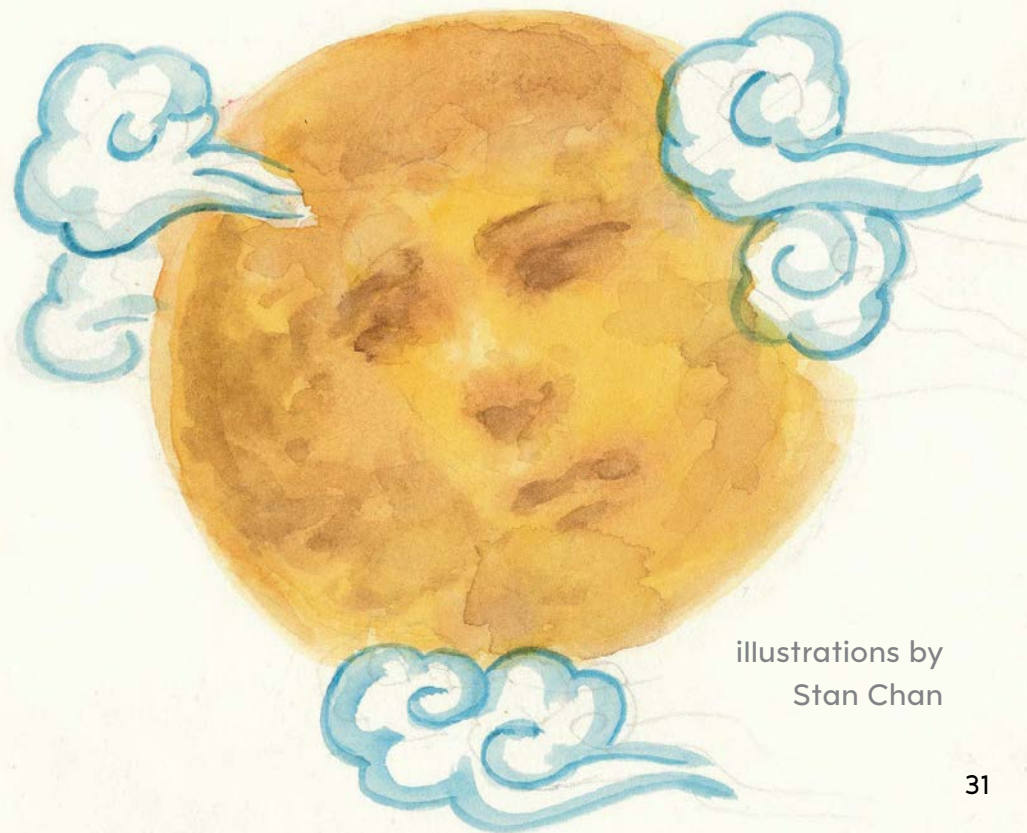
Try as she might, Chang-O could not make herself come back down. She floated up and up until she reached the moon in the heavens.



When Hou Yi came home and saw the empty bottle, he knew his wife had gone forever. He was full of grief and cried out his wife's name again and again. The Queen of Heaven heard Hou Yi's cry and took pity on him. She decided that she would let Hou Yi see Chang-O.

That night, the moon was big and bright. Hou Yi looked up and was amazed to see a shape in the moon that looked just like his wife! Then he realised that Chang-O had become a goddess of the moon.

Now, once a year, Chang-O returns. Look up – if it's a clear night, you will be able to see her.



illustrations by
Stan Chan

The Moon Festival

A note from the author

When I was a child, I was told the story of Chang-O and the Moon. Every year, I look for Chang-O in the sky. She returns in September (or sometimes in early October) when the moon is full.

That's when Chinese families get together to celebrate the Moon Festival. We worship the moon for peace and good luck, and we think about loved ones who live far away. We eat moon cakes and fruit, drink tea, and enjoy meals with our family.



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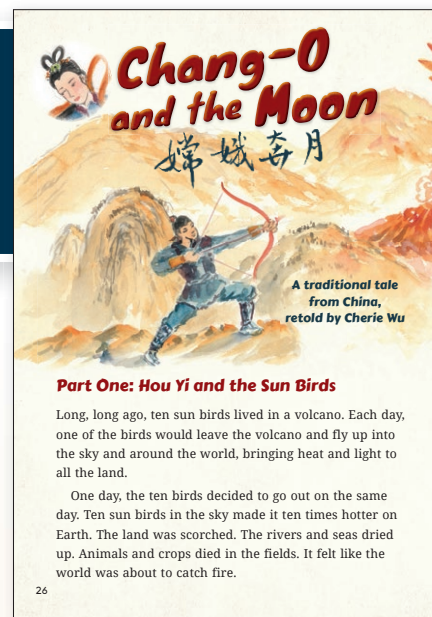
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