

Excerpt from “Bronze and Sunflower”

P.138-142

Sunflower pointed to the glowing ball in the sky, then found a stick and wrote two characters in the earth:

太阳

She read them out loud: “*Tai yang*... the sun.” She retraced the strokes of the characters over and over again, naming each of the brushstrokes as she wrote. “*Heng* (a horizontal line), *bie* (descending to the left), *ca* (descending to the right) and finally *dian* (a dot). That’s tai...”

She found a stick for Bronze and made him copy what she had written. Bronze concentrated. He was used to being the older one, and it felt strange being taught by Sunflower.

Slowly, the sun was setting. Slowly, a leaf fell from the tree. Sunflower pointed to the fluttering leaf, and as she watched it, she said, “*Luo*... falling, *luo xia qu*... falling down.” It settled on the grass like a butterfly. Sunflower wrote three more characters after the first two:

太阳落下去

She read them out loud: “*Tai yang luo xia qu*... the sun is setting.”

Bronze had a good memory and once he had grasped the names of the strokes, and knew that they had to be written in a particular order, it was astonishing how quickly he learned.

By now the sun had sunk low and it was getting more and more difficult to see the characters in the earth.

“It’s time to go home,” said Sunflower.

But Bronze shook his head and carried on writing with the stick. As the moon rose, it shone a different kind of light- a pure, soft light- over the ground.

Bronze pointed to the moon.

“We’ve finished for today,” said Sunflower.

Bronze kept pointing at the moon until she taught him how to write *yue liang*... the moon; *yue liang sheng shang lai*... the moon is rising.

月亮升上来

It was getting late, and Mama was calling them.

All the way home, Bronze was remembering and writing in his mind, *tai yang luo xia qu*... *yue liang sheng shang lai*.

太阳落下去

月亮升上来

Bronze was hungry to learn and gobbled up every character Sunflower knew, writing them out on the ground and in his notebook. The two of them never stopped. Wherever they went, whatever they saw, Bronze wanted to know what the characters were. He learned how to write the characters for buffalo and sheep. He also learned how to put characters together to build sentences.

牛	<i>niu</i>	buffalo
牛吃草	<i>niu chi cao</i>	the buffalo's eating grass
羊	<i>yang</i>	sheep
羊打架	<i>yang da jia</i>	the sheep are fighting

And so it went on:

天	<i>tian</i>	sky
地	<i>di</i>	earth
风	<i>feng</i>	wind
雨	<i>yu</i>	rain
鸭子	<i>yazi</i>	duck
鸽子	<i>gezi</i>	pigeon
大鸭子	<i>da yazi</i>	big duck
小鸭子	<i>xiao yazi</i>	little duck
白鸽子	<i>bai gezi</i>	white pigeon
黑鸽子	<i>hei gezi</i>	black pigeon

Bronze saw the beautiful world around him transform into the magical world of characters. The sun became more gorgeous, more vivid, more enticing than ever. Likewise, the moon, the sky, the earth, the wind, the rain... everything took on a new life. And Bronze, who was used to careering around the fields whatever the weather, was changing too. He was calmer than he used to be.