

The village of Mi was a small village in the shadows of the mountains. No one came, no one left. Year in and year out the villagers worked together to grow rice so they could survive the harsh winters.

One morning, on the day of planting, the villagers opened up their only storehouse and were horrified. All of the seeds had been eaten by rats. There was nothing left to plant. The villagers would starve, and there was nothing to be done.

But one young boy, Kai, knew there *was* something to be done. All his life he had been taught to respect the great dragon, Weilong, who lived in the mountains above Mi. Very few had ever seen the great dragon, but the village elders recalled a time when the people of Mi had made Weilong very angry. The village had almost been destroyed in the flames of Weilong's fury. However, so long as the people left Weilong alone, he left them alone. Many years passed in this peaceful manner. But the villagers were always reverent of the great dragon, never forgetting his monumental power and setting out sacrifices to him.

But Kai was desperate. So in the middle of the night, Kai snuck out of his village and journeyed towards Weilong's cave. The mountain was steep and rocky, but Kai clambered on, slowly and steadily. He climbed all night until, finally, as the first rays of dawn washed over the mountain, Kai stood in front of Weilong's cave.

Kai was tired and weak, trembling all over. But his voice was strong, "Great dragon, great dragon! Come out!"

Kai's voice echoed in the cave, magnified. But Weilong did not appear. Kai drew a deep breath and shouted again, "Great dragon, great dragon! Come out!"

But again there was no answer. Kai would not give up. He drew breath a third time, but the first word had barely crossed his lips when he was answered with a tremendous roar and a gout of scorching flame. The mountain trembled, rocks clattering down its sides. Kai felt heat slap his face, and he was sure that his eyebrows had been burned off. Then Weilong, the great dragon, stepped out. And he was terrible. With a single pounce he threw Kai to the ground and trapped the young boy under his gleaming claws. Weilong bent his neck so an eye as black as night stared into Kai's own chocolate orbs. Kai was sure he was about to die. Then, Weilong spoke, his deep voice majestic and powerful, "I am Weilong, the great dragon. I have come out. Speak before I devour you!"

Kai swallowed hard, "Oh, great dragon, I have heard of your strength and power all the days of my life! I have come to beg of you assistance. My village has no rice to plant, and we will starve. Please, grant me this boon."

For a terrifying moment, unwavering black met shivering brown. Kai felt tears of strain well up in his eyes. But then, Weilong spoke, “You are brave, little one. And it is for your bravery that I will grant you three desires.”

Weilong released Kai. He then lifted a claw and pulled a scale off his back, handing it to little Kai. Kai accepted it as if handling a dangerous animal, disbelief widening his eyes as he listened to Weilong’s instructions, “Take my scale and bring a hammer to its surface. You will have your seed. Now, leave. You may approach me twice more, but tread softly lest I return your lowly body to the ashes from whence it came.”

Hugging the scale tight to his body, Kai bowed low to the dragon, thanks bubbling up all over his lips and tongue, even as he began to painful descent.

Kai returned to his village, where upon he brought hammer to the scale. Once, twice, thrice he hammered the scale. Each time, a shower of the finest seeds cascaded from the scale like rain. A fourth time, and the scale shattered, bringing forth yet more luxurious rice. The villagers rejoiced. Gathering every precious grain, they plowed their land and sowed the seeds. When harvest time came, the village of Mi gathered the most bountiful harvest they had in decades. Little Kai was a savior. So Mi lived in peace and prosperity, growing slowly in size.

But several years later, catastrophe once again visited the village of Mi. The river that the villagers depended upon dried up to nothing. An agony of thirst racked the village of Mi. And with no water, not even the magical rice of the great dragon could grow. Once again the villagers were desperate. There was nothing to be done.

So once again, Kai made his perilous journey up the mountain to visit the great dragon Weilong. Upon reaching Weilong’s cave, Kai called out three times, “Great dragon, great dragon! Come out!”

Weilong emerged in a spout of flame and a quaking of the earth, demanding why Kai had returned, insolent fool! Kai, older now, and remembering how bravery had saved the day, boldly reminded Weilong that he had promised two boons. Laughing at Kai’s audacity, Weilong inquired as to what Kai desired. Kai explained that his village was withering away for lack of water. Weilong looked down upon the landscape, his lips curling over his fangs in disdain of such insignificant life. But not one to break his word, Weilong turned his head and expelled a glob of spit into the mountain side. Where the spit landed, a spring of purest water burst forth, creating a merry river that flowed all the way down to the village of Mi. Joyfully Kai thanked Weilong and left.

The village of Mi survived. With magical seed and magical water of the great dragon, their crop expanded and grew so much that the village became a town, and a town became a city. And this city was so prosperous that rich merchants and traders traveled from afar to haggle and trade luxuries for the famous rice of Mi. Word spread far and wide of the City of Mi, until once

day the news reached the feared bandits of the north. Realizing Mi's potential, the bandits of the north attacked and took Mi by surprise. The people of Mi, knowing nothing about the art of war, could only surrender to the bandits and turn over all their goods. They were forced to toil in the fields from sun up to sun down. The bandits of the north planted a tyranny over the City of Mi, and they held it with ruthless malice. The people groaned under the weight of their oppression. Knowing there was no solution but one, Kai snuck out of the city and returned a third time to Weilong, the great dragon.

Weilong had been watching the city of Mi with keen calculation glittering in his eyes, and it was no surprise to him when Kai, no longer a little boy, hauled himself easily over the ledge. Forgoing any formalities, Kai commanded his last desire. Weilong reared his head at Kai's haste, smoke curling dangerously around his fangs, his voice rumbling as he asked what it was Kai desired. Kai's answer was a way to drive out the bandits. Breaking a branch off a tree with a loud splintering, Weilong breathed fire over the branch, morphing it into a beautiful sword.

"Take this blade," Weilong instructed, "and you will drive the bandits of the north away."

Kai accepted the sword and left Weilong without thanks. He returned to his city and single-handedly drove away the bandits with the magical sword. The City of Mi threw a festival to their hero, Kai, who had saved them thrice. Once from starvation, once from drought, and once from bandits. For several long, long years, the City of Mi was undisturbed again, booming with triumph. Slowly the City of Mi forgot all about Weilong the great dragon. But Weilong did not forget about the City of Mi, or Kai. The noises of the city were very loud, and Weilong could no longer sleep. When Weilong looked down at the City of Mi, he saw that they no longer respected the ways of the land, disrupting the laws of nature in their own greed. So one day, Weilong descended the mountain in a storm of vengeance and wreathed the City of Mi in flames. All was utter chaos.

The people of the Mi were terrified, but in the midst of their senseless panic, they remembered their hero, Kai. Pleading with him, they asked him to deliver them from the wrath of the great dragon. They no longer wanted to live in the shadow of his presence, in danger of angering him so easily. Kai, forgetting that it was Weilong who had helped him long ago, confidently agreed. A fourth time he made the climb up the mountain. Standing in front of the cave, Kai called, "Dragon, dragon! Come out!"

Weilong thundered out on the first cry, demanding penance from the City of Mi for the crimes they had committed. Kai laughed at the dragon. And laughed. And laughed. He said, "Stupid dragon, what could you do against the City of Mi with I as their protector?"

Kai stabbed at Weilong with his magical sword. But the sword, recognizing its maker, turned back into the branch that it was made from. It bounced off of Weilong's scales and then turned into dust, leaving Kai without a weapon. Suddenly Kai realized his mistake and fell to his

knees, pleading with Weilong for forgiveness. But it was too late. Kai was no longer the scared little boy with admirable bravery. He was an impudent man with no respect. And Weilong saw this. With a roar and a pounce and a snap of his jaws, Weilong swallowed Kai up, never to be the hero of Mi again.