



# THE Coconut Monk

*By*  
Thich Nhat Hanh

ILLUSTRATED BY VO-DINH MAI



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AS TOLD TO RACHEL NEUMANN • ILLUSTRATED BY VO-DINH MAI

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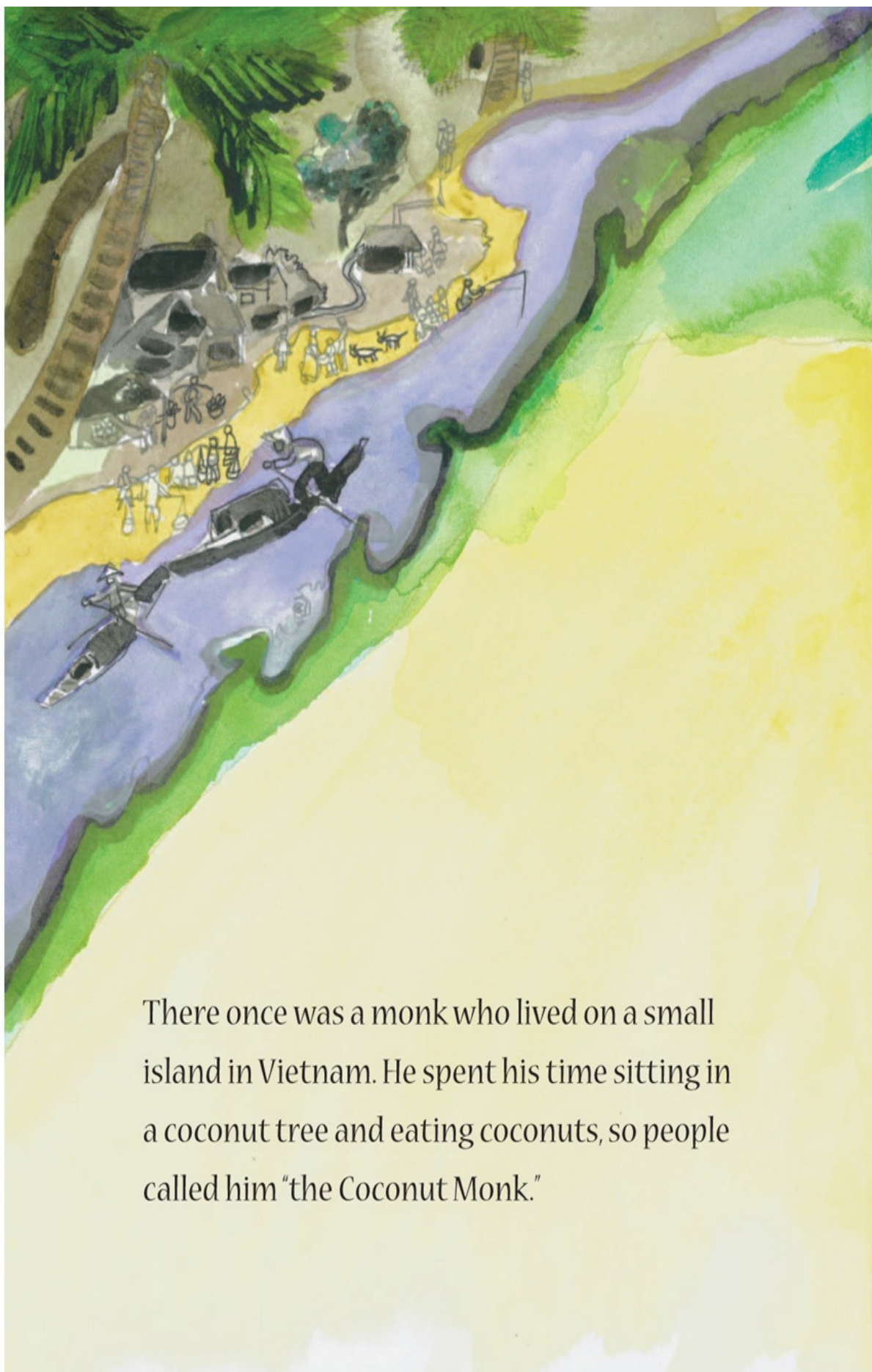


# Contents

[The Coconut Monk](#)

[Who Was The Coconut Monk?](#)





There once was a monk who lived on a small island in Vietnam. He spent his time sitting in a coconut tree and eating coconuts, so people called him "the Coconut Monk."











The Coconut Monk had two good friends,  
a cat and a mouse. Every day they would  
climb up the coconut tree and play  
together.











The Coconut Monk enjoyed sitting high in the tree with his friends. He would watch the boats going by on the Mekong Delta and listen to the birds sing.











The Coconut Monk lived in a time when Vietnam was at war. All the fighting made him very sad.

One day, he went out walking. While he walked, he collected bits of metal, pieces of bombs and bullets that littered the land. He melted all the pieces and molded them together to make a beautiful bell.











He told the pieces of metal, "You have been playing the game of war. Now you can help create peace."

Every night, before going to sleep, he would strike the bell.

Its music echoed out into the night sky.



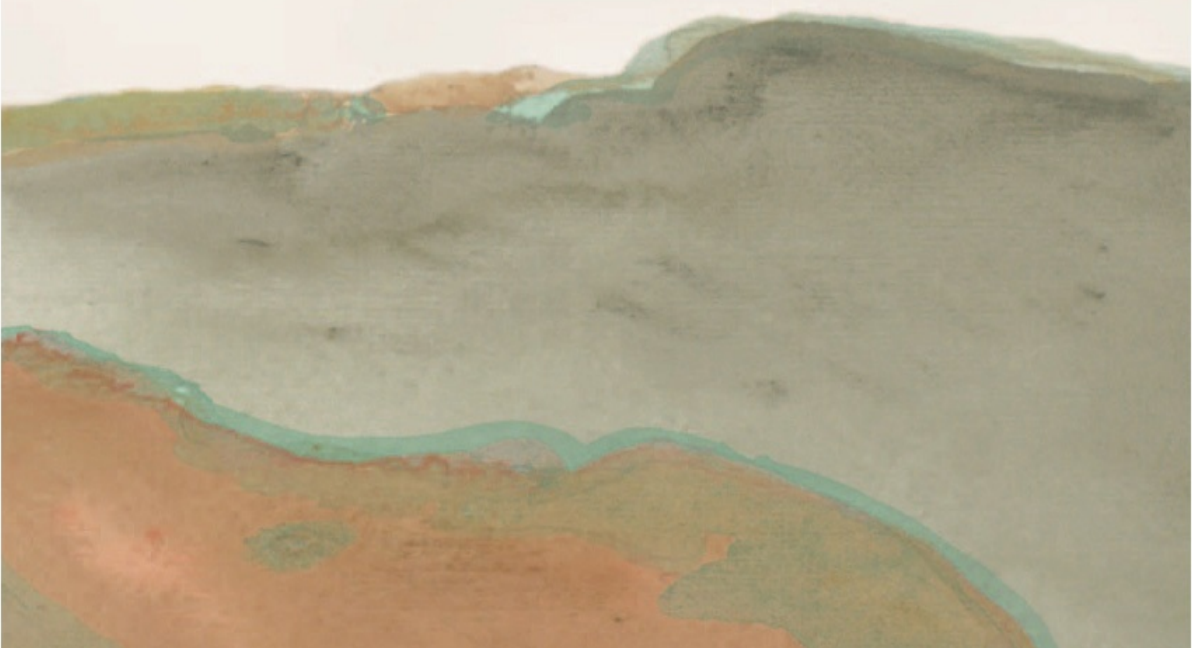






The Coconut Monk decided to go and ask the president to stop the war.

He didn't have any belongings, so packing was very easy. He just climbed down the tree and he was ready to go!











But the Coconut Monk didn't go alone.  
His two friends, the cat and the mouse,  
came along to keep him company.

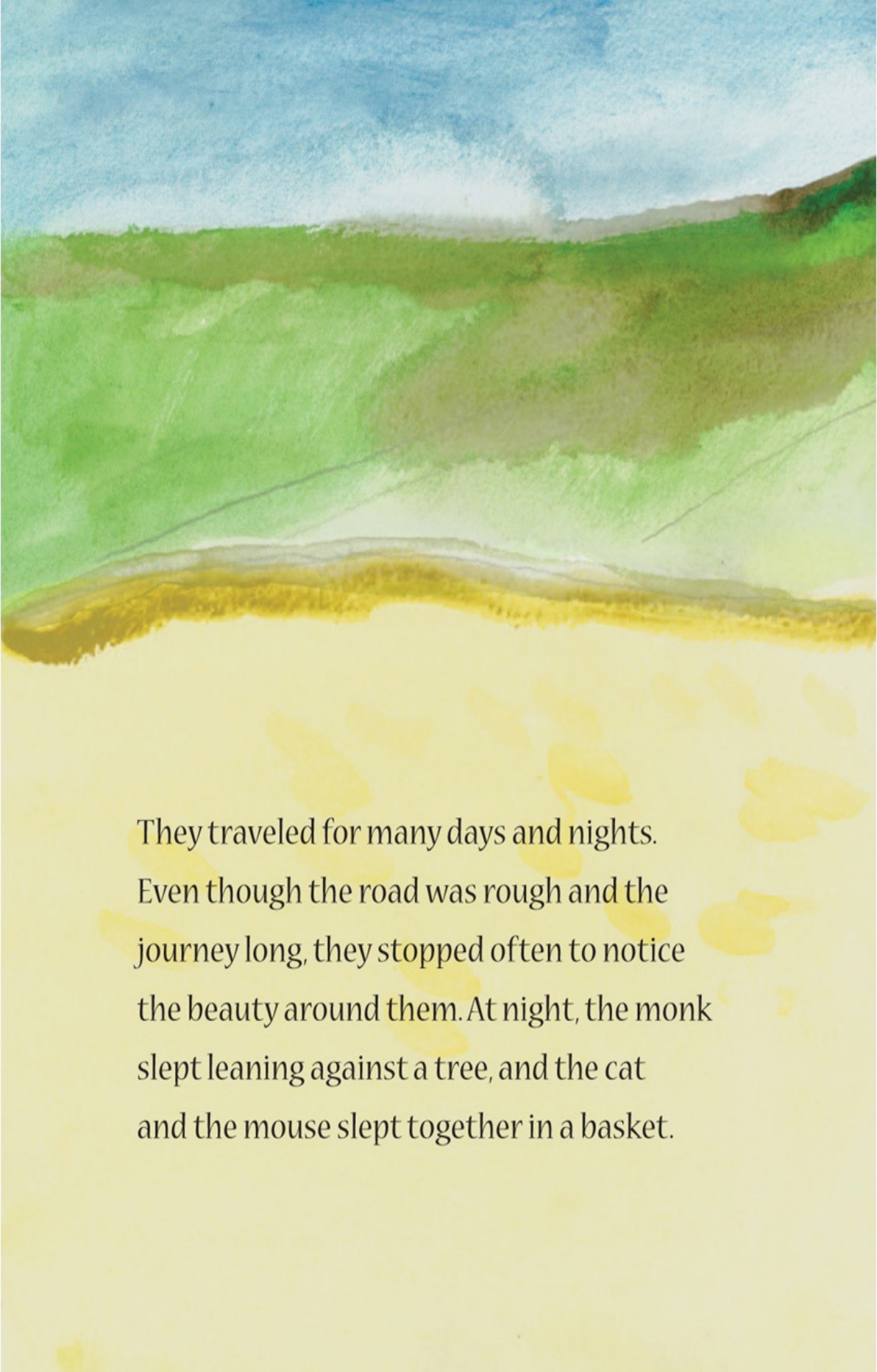








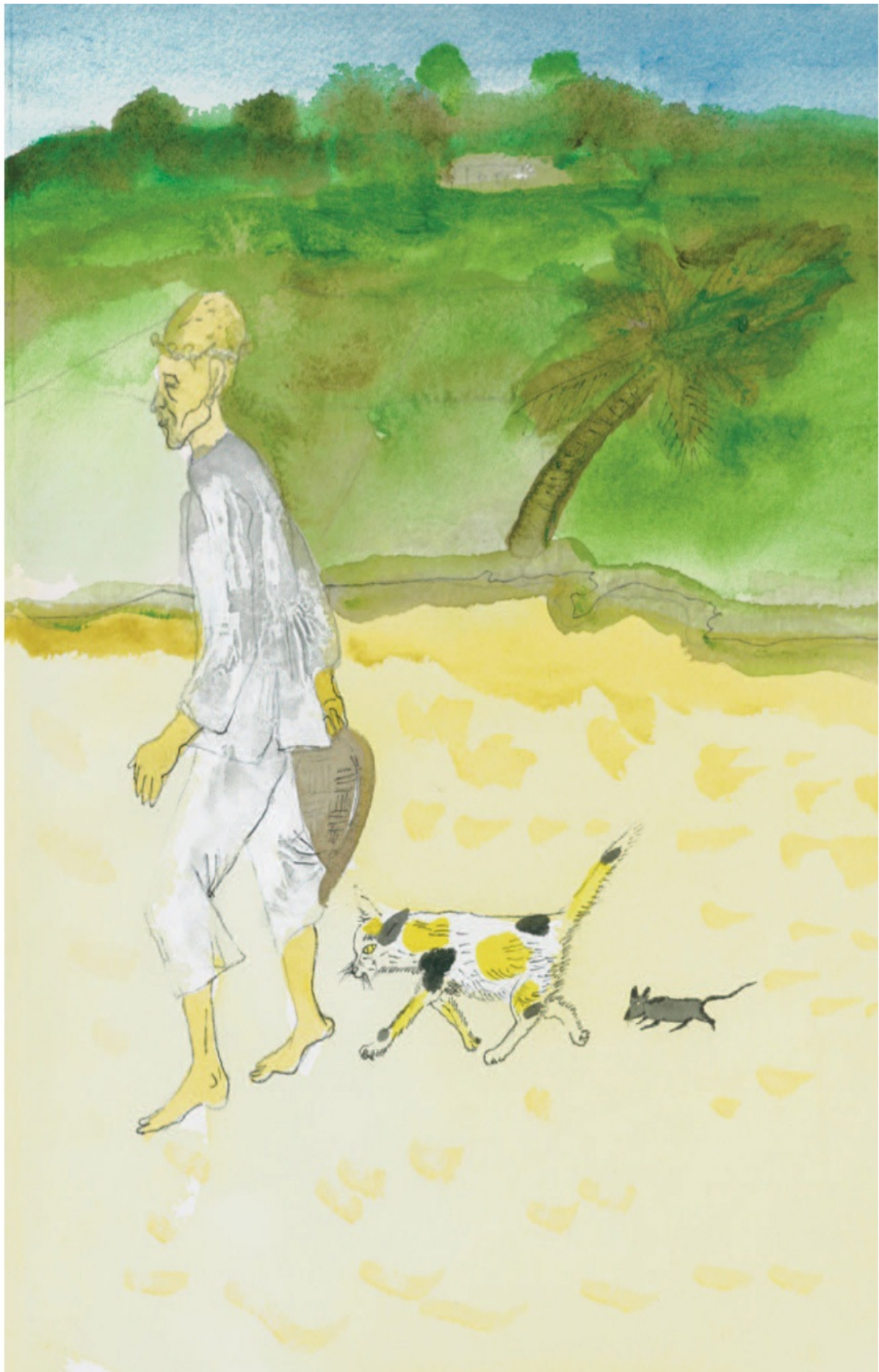




They traveled for many days and nights.  
Even though the road was rough and the  
journey long, they stopped often to notice  
the beauty around them. At night, the monk  
slept leaning against a tree, and the cat  
and the mouse slept together in a basket.







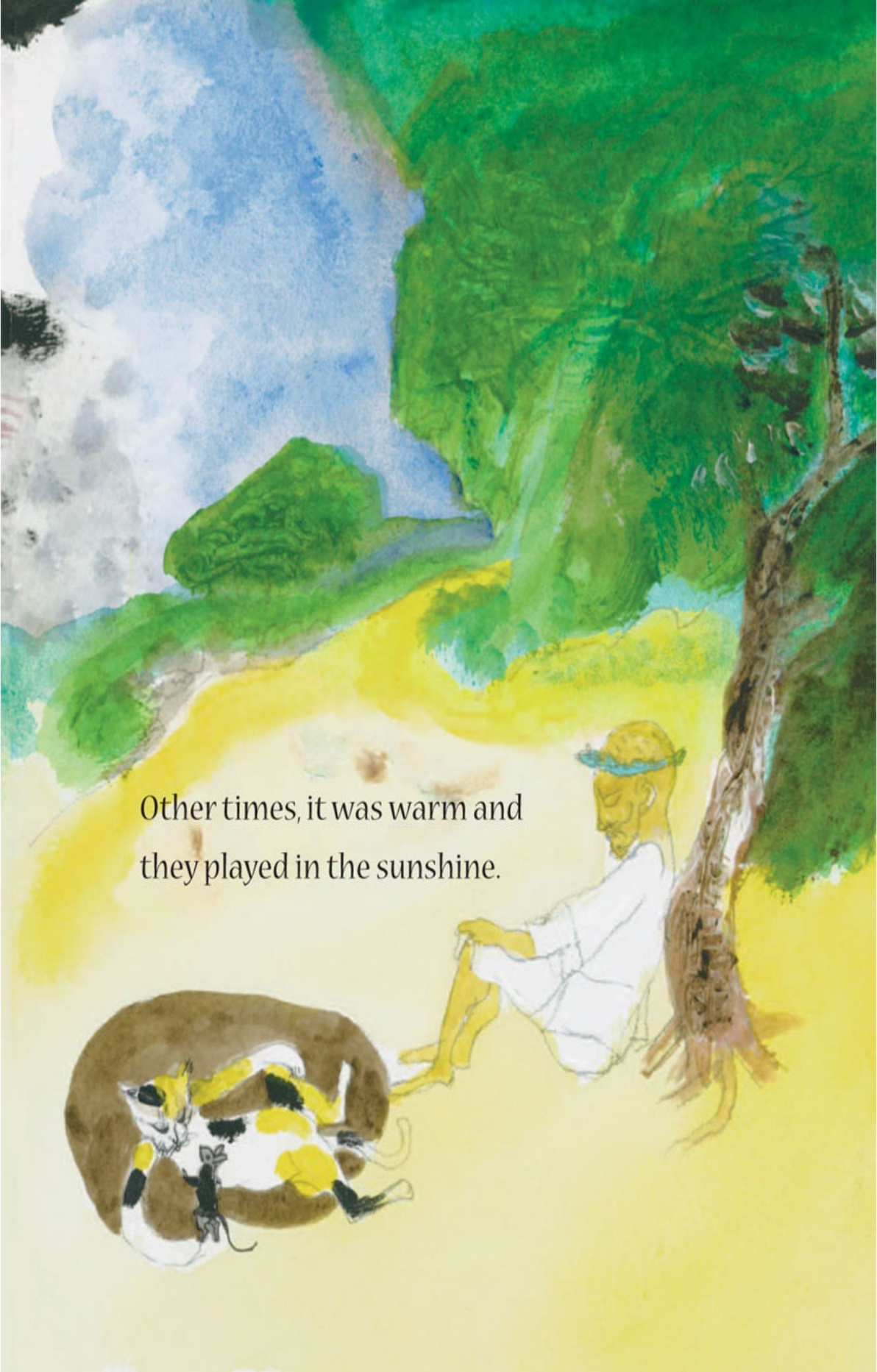


Sometimes it was rainy and cold  
and the friends huddled together.









Other times, it was warm and  
they played in the sunshine.





Finally, they reached  
the presidential palace,  
a huge white building  
surrounded by guards.  
The guards would not  
let them in.

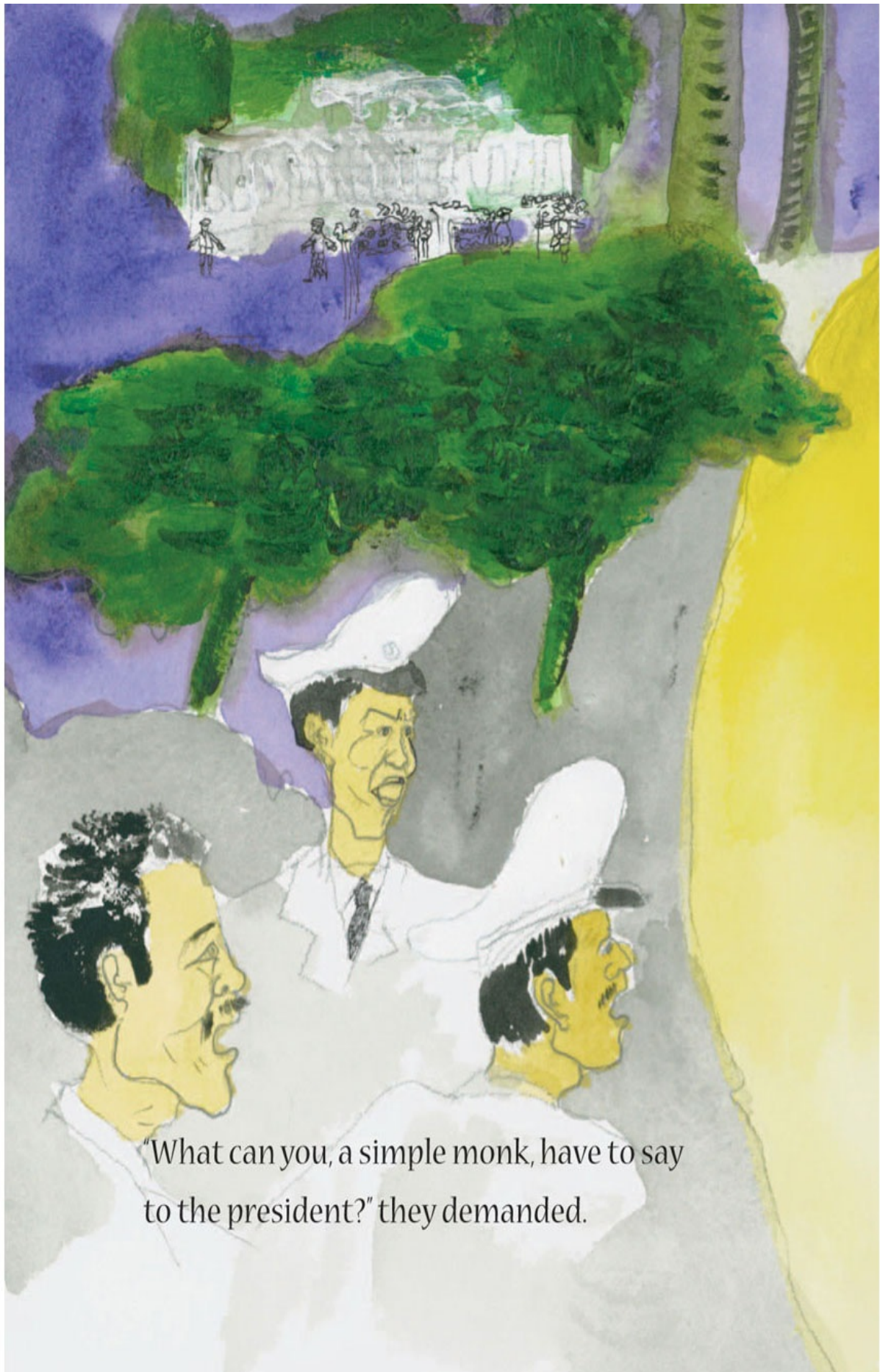












"What can you, a simple monk, have to say to the president?" they demanded.





The Coconut Monk held up the basket with the cat and the mouse playing happily together.

"I would like all people to live together in peace," he said, "the way my friends the cat and the mouse do. Surely our differences are not bigger than theirs."





When the guards heard this,  
they became angry. "You fool!"  
they shouted and grabbed  
the monk. They threw him  
in prison. Because the cat and  
the mouse wouldn't leave their  
friend, the guards had to throw  
them in prison too.











The prison was dark and cold.  
But the Coconut Monk sat very quietly  
and continued to breathe peacefully,  
just as he had in his coconut tree.











The Coconut Monk shared  
his food with the cat and  
mouse and all the other  
prisoners. And even though  
there wasn't much food,  
the cat didn't eat the mouse.













People started asking about the Coconut Monk.  
They wrote letters and visited him in prison.  
Soon, the guards had no choice but to release him.











The monk, the cat, and the mouse returned  
to their coconut tree.

If a cat and a mouse can live together in peace,  
don't you think we humans can too?







## **Who Was The Coconut Monk?**

DAO DUA (?-1990) was known as the “Coconut Monk,” because his vegetarian diet consisted largely of coconuts. Born Nguyen Thanh Nam, he was trained as a chemical engineer in Paris before becoming a Buddhist teacher in his homeland of Vietnam. A strong advocate for peace, Dao Dua established a religious community on Phoenix Island in the Mekong River in the early 1960s that drew from Buddhist, Taoist, and Christian traditions. He was imprisoned a number of times by the government for preaching his pacifist beliefs and advocating the peaceful reunification of North and South Vietnam. The “Coconut Monk” attracted thousands of followers and the island became a haven for those attempting to escape the ravages of the war in Vietnam, including Vietnamese peasants and American soldiers. The sanctuary that he built on the island where he made his home can still be visited by boat today.



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