



The One-Sided Painter

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What makes a painting truly beautiful? Is a busy and elaborate picture always better? Is leaving space on the canvas a sign of incompleteness? This book brings a painter's world to life, focusing on his deliberate choice to leave empty spaces in his artwork.

Using modern ink painting, award-winning illustrator Liu-Chen Kuo creates a witty and charming story that both entertains and teaches about art. This book delves into the artistry and philosophy of what is left unsaid.



Liu Chen-Kuo

Born in Taipei in 1966, Liu Chen-Kuo leads a simple, orderly life and has a particular interest in simple forms. His major works include *Is It Like That?*, *It's Raining!*, *The Scariest Day*, *I'm Willing!*, *Grandma Lin's Peach Tree*, *Artist Ade*, *Frog Hero Jianghehu*, *Frog Aju's Call*, and *Jump! Frog Xiao Bi*. He has received numerous awards, including the Taipei International Book Exhibition "Exhibition Award," the White Raven Award from the International Youth Library in Germany, the Golden Tripod Award for Best Illustration, the Feng Zikai Children's Picture Book Award, the "Good Books for All" Annual Best Youth Literature Award, and the Hsin Yi Children's Literature Award. He has also been selected for the Bologna Illustrators Exhibition in Italy.

The Art of Leaving Space in *The One-Sided Painter*

by Sarah C.Ko
(originally published in OpenBook)

Transforming abstract concepts into precise and resonant storylines requires profound thought. Creators must possess skills and a clear vision to undertake such an intangible endeavor.

Liu Chen-Kuo's new work, *The One-Sided Painter*, is a delightful testament to this. This picture book explains the concept of "leaving space" in an accessible manner, allowing children to easily grasp the idea while inspiring reflection and imagination—a rare achievement. The seemingly simple and lighthearted story conveys complex ideas, among them the use of negative space.

Leaving space in painting evokes beauty through emptiness. Akin to metaphor or contrast in literature, to leave space achieves a sense of silence surpassing sound, or nothingness surpassing substance. Chinese painting emphasizes essence over form, focusing on the dynamic spirit of the scene. Proper

negative space allows the artwork to appear as if it breathes and flows.

Some compare this concept to the game of Go: if one does not leave open spaces, no matter how many stones are played, it results in a dead game. This unspoken depth also represents a perspective on life, often considered by many philosophers to be the ideal state of being—tranquility that allows for great distances, where vastness can exist within a small space.

This picture story employs negative space to shape characters and advance the plot, inviting readers into the narrative to pause in the blank areas, contemplating the implied meanings and emotions that are not explicitly stated. For instance, when depicting Ma Yi-pian's napping habits, the left page is completely blank, effectively highlighting the theme and character traits in a natural and impactful way. After Ma

Yibian finishes breakfast and sets out to find inspiration, he visits a friend who is napping. The simple narrative reveals the long passage of time and distance, hinting at his dedication to art and valuing friendship. Ma Yi-pian quietly stands to the side and, after a while, happily returns home.

The seemingly simple and lighthearted story conveys complex ideas, among them the use of negative space in painting, the blank spaces in literature, and the need for philosophical reflection.

This scene resembles a cinematic moment, with characters vividly portrayed without excessive explanation, allowing readers to interpret the clues: What is he thinking? How does he transition from worry to joy?

Meanwhile, when the painting is finished, guests differ in their judgments. Some even try to "help" revise the piece. Descriptions like "beautiful, lively, rich" serve as both commentary and aesthetic viewpoints, encouraging children to ponder their meanings and the implications for the artwork—a valuable exercise in developing artistic appreciation.

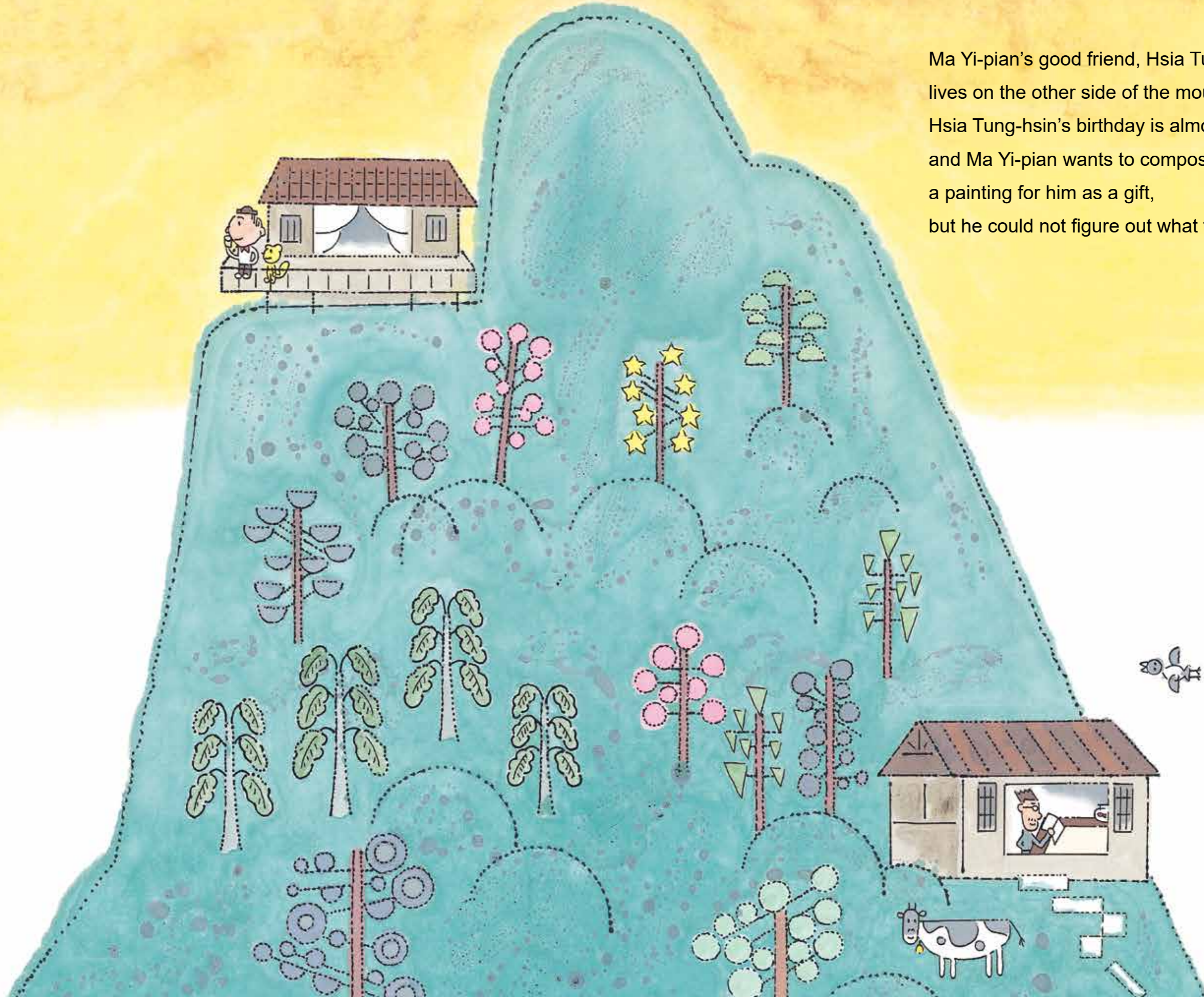
In the end, amidst the chaos, a child's remark draws attention back to the theme and the artist, subtly hinting at the author's perspective on leaving space: emptiness is not void; it has a meaningful existence. The relationship between the void (the blank space) and the presence (Mr. Dongxin napping) is deeply interdependent.

The surprising conclusion deepens the thematic significance of the entire story, showcasing cleverness and ingenuity. A clear-eyed child contrasts with the self-satisfied adult, providing a humorous reminder that many kids, when making art, are less inclined to follow established rules or others' suggestions.

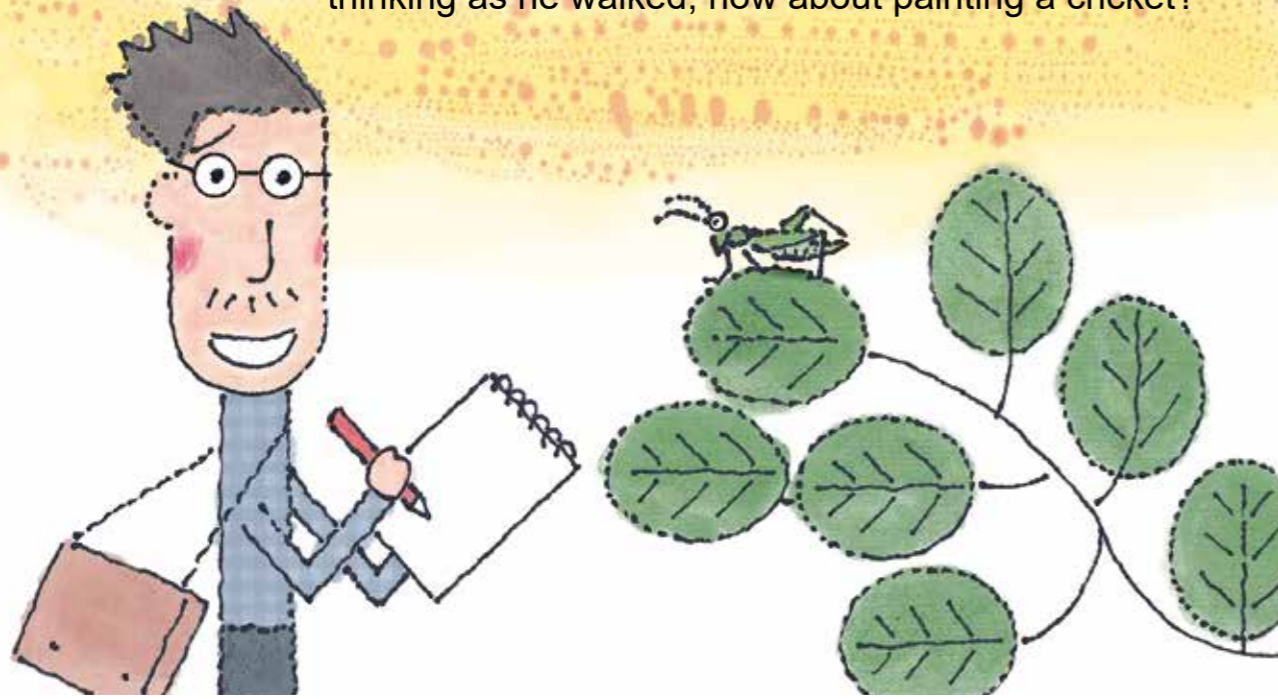
How do unconventional individuals coexist harmoniously with others? How do we comprehend human potential and individuality? These considerations have always been central themes in Liu's work. *The One-Sided Painter* leaves readers with a lasting impression, not only due to its rich narrative and ink wash style but also because it encapsulates the creator's long-standing dedication and concern for the art of picture books.

Sarah C.Ko is a children's literature critic.

Ma Yi-pian's good friend, Hsia Tung-hsin, lives on the other side of the mountain. Hsia Tung-hsin's birthday is almost here, and Ma Yi-pian wants to compose a painting for him as a gift, but he could not figure out what to paint.



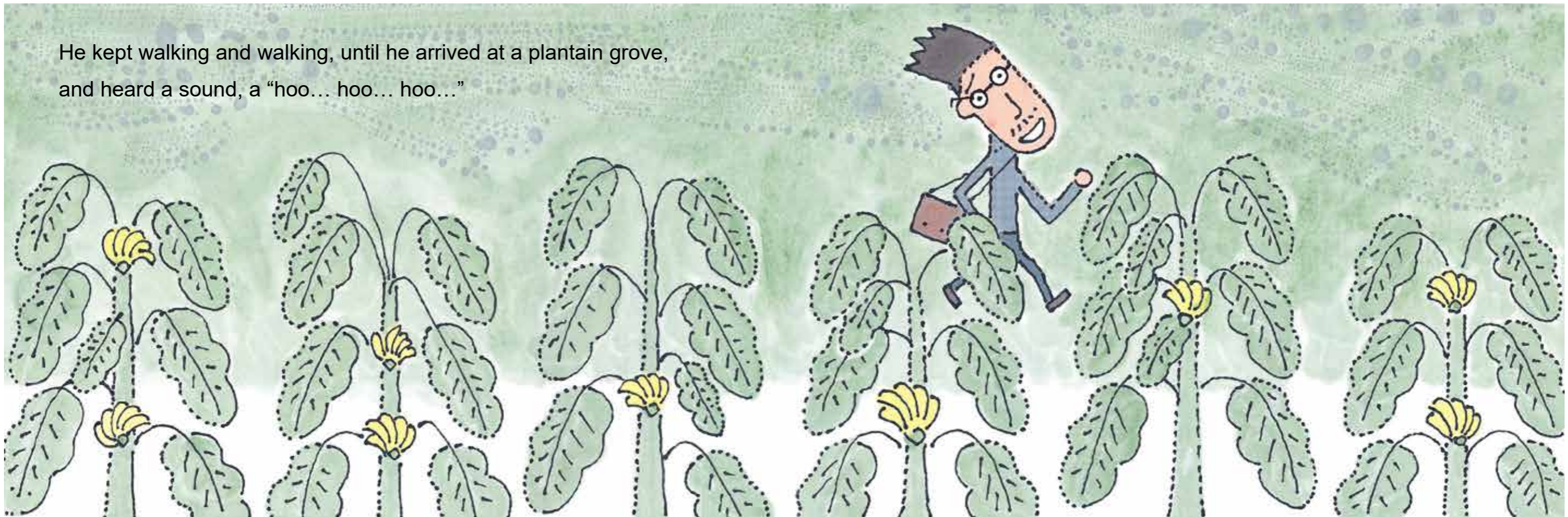
On this day, he went out for a stroll after breakfast,
thinking as he walked, how about painting a cricket?

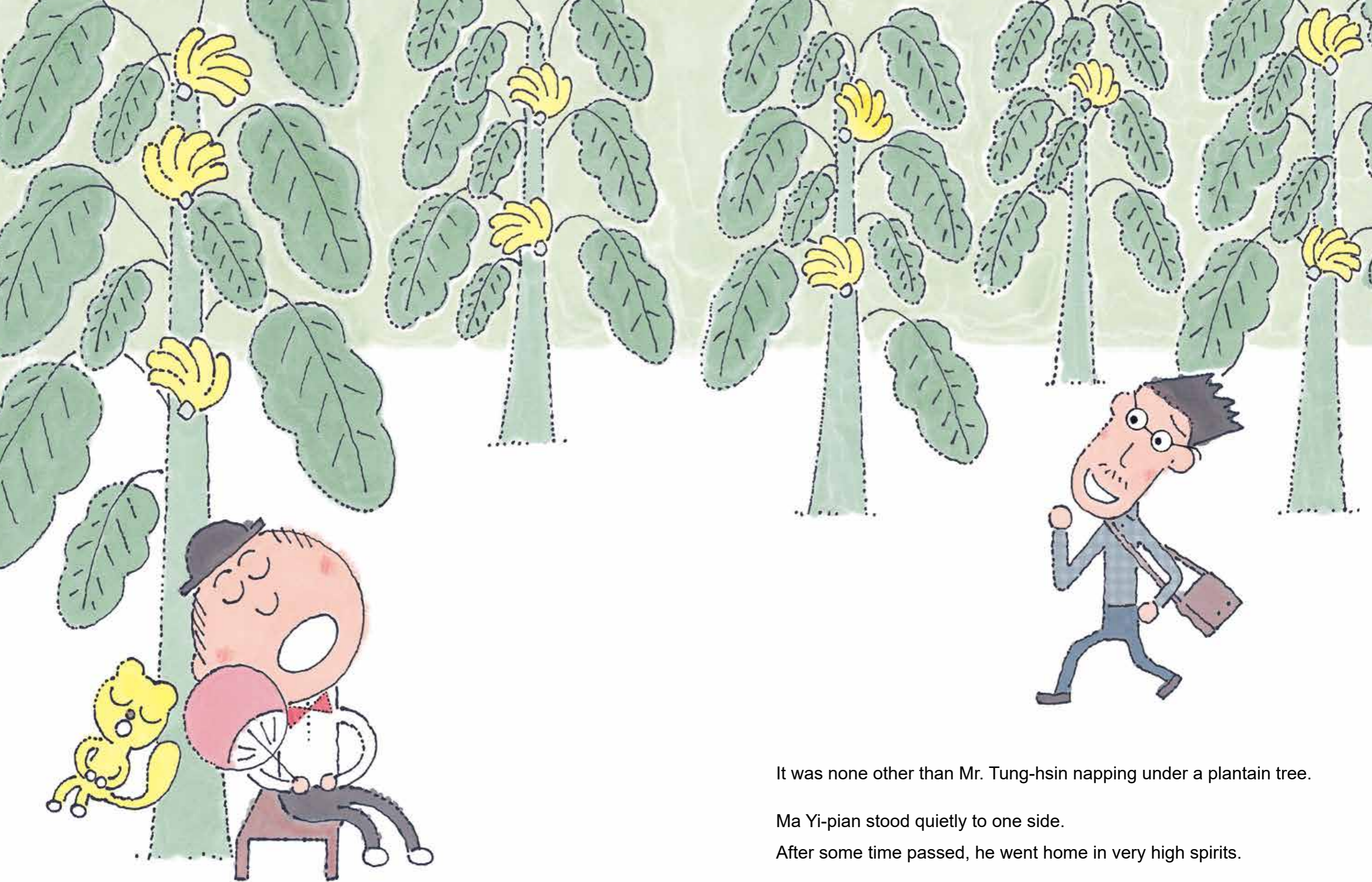


Or crayfish?



He kept walking and walking, until he arrived at a plantain grove,
and heard a sound, a “hoo... hoo... hoo...”





It was none other than Mr. Tung-hsin napping under a plantain tree.

Ma Yi-pian stood quietly to one side.

After some time passed, he went home in very high spirits.