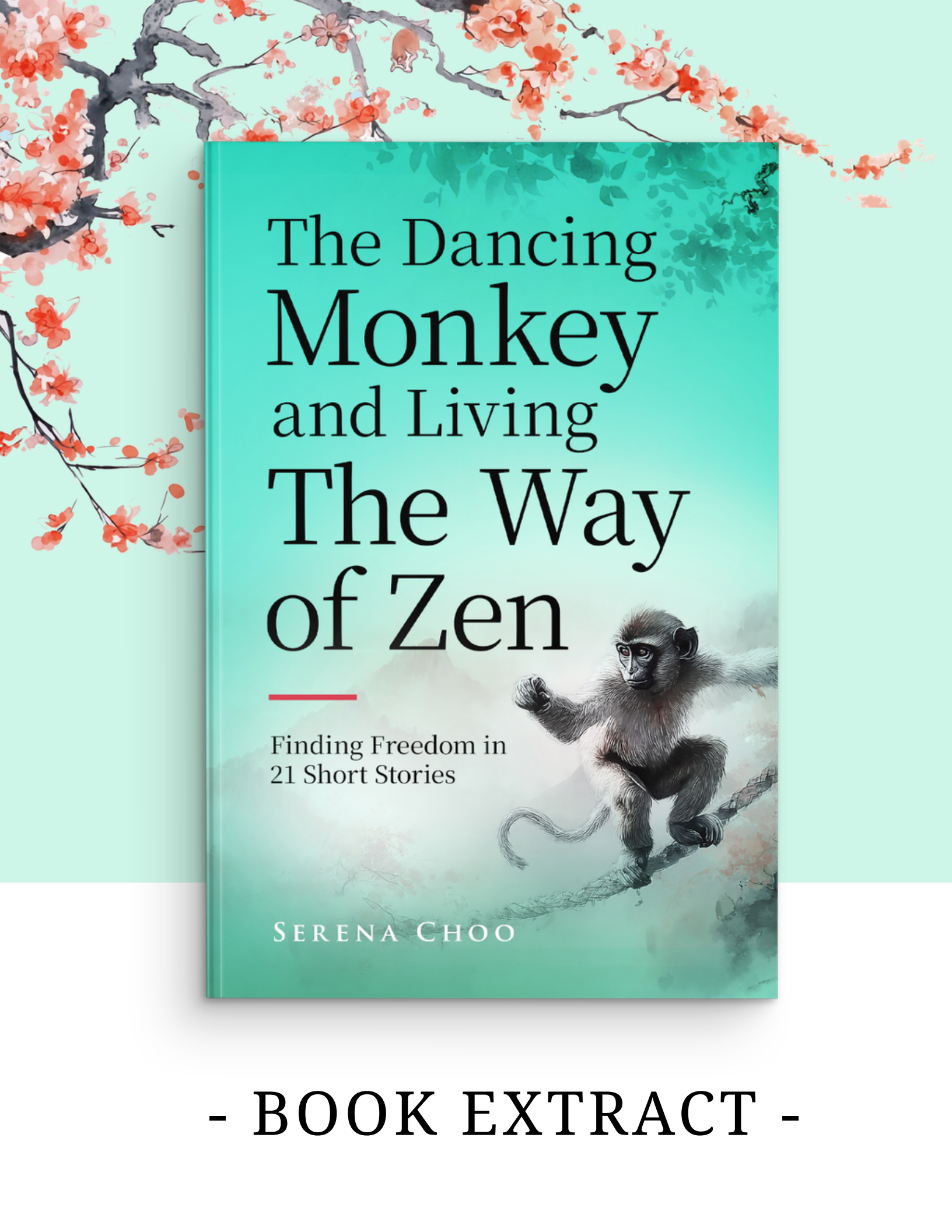




The Dancing Monkey and Living The Way of Zen

Finding Freedom in
21 Short Stories

SERENA CHOO

- BOOK EXTRACT -



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Invitation

Come, take a seat.

There is no rush, no urgency.

This isn't a brand-new path, but a deepening of one you're already on.

Let it unfold. Because it's not about chasing a breakthrough or discovering a new truth but a return to what's quietly been here all along.

Your mind may still want to find more answers or try to figure it all out.

But something quieter in you is starting to listen. To notice.

These stories are not about becoming wise or doing Zen the "right" way. They are about living, in all its mess, beauty, conflict, and joy.

So you won't find any formulas to follow here. Instead, just notice what moves you as you read.

Read slowly. Maybe more than once. Take what resonates and let the rest pass through. Another day, another time, you might come back and find something speaks to you where it didn't before. It's all perfect.

At the end of each chapter, there's a short Pause & Reflect. Just a gentle invitation to linger with what touched you. To sit with what's quietly speaking underneath the words.

So take a breath.

And let the dance begin.

Prologue

The fig tree had seen it all.

It had watched a restless young monkey arrive at the temple, eyes full of questions, mind caught in restless seeking. He came searching for something to fix his life, maybe even himself. And when no answers arrived fast enough, he fought, resisted, and leaped at every lesson as if it might finally make him whole.

But the fig tree had watched him stay.

He was the wandering monkey, a monkey who once had no patience for stillness, who had paced circles in the courtyard and declared the temple was “too slow for real learning.”

There was the time he tried to build a shortcut to peace using rocks from the Zen garden. “I’m stacking wisdom,” he’d announced proudly, balancing pebbles into a teetering tower, until it collapsed, sending a startled lizard skittering across the courtyard. The Master hadn’t said a word. Just handed him a broom and returned to sipping tea.

The fig tree had shaded him through confusion, through silence, through stories that didn’t give him what he wanted, but slowly gave him what he needed. It had stood steady as the monkey began to listen, not just to the Master, but to the wind, the water, the spaces between thoughts.

One day, something shifted... a quiet release, like a tightly wound vine finally unfurling.

He stopped chasing.

He began to smile without reason, to leap without striving, to dance through the trees, not because he needed to get somewhere but because it felt like freedom. Other times, he smiled just because the breeze tickled his ears in a way that made it seem like the world had just told him a joke only he was in on. He laughed when the koi splashed him for no reason, leaped for the sheer delight of being airborne. Sometimes, tears would arise unexpectedly at the simple beauty of raindrops on leaves or the gentle brush of a morning breeze.

The temple students watched with quiet wonder. He used to interrupt every silence. Now he could sit in one. Some whispered that he had changed. A few said he had softened. But none could deny it; there was a lightness to him now.

That's when they began to call him something new.

The Dancing Monkey.

Not because he was wise or because he was a master, but because he had learned to move with life instead of against it.



He could have stayed forever. He knew that.

He had found peace beneath these trees, had learned how to stop trying to hold on, had learned how to let go. In that final conversation beneath the fig tree, the Master had smiled and said, "Now you live. You laugh. You eat when hungry. Rest when tired. Meet each moment as it comes. Wisdom is not something to carry like a stone in your pocket. It's like the air... felt, but not held."

The monkey had smiled too.

"It really is that simple?"

"Simple," the Master had said, "but not always easy."

Now, the simplicity was calling him somewhere else.

Not toward another temple, or another teacher, but back to the place he had once left behind.

Back to the jungle.

No longer to escape, or to seek, or even to teach.

But to live.

The fig tree silently knew what lay ahead for the monkey.

But it said nothing. The monkey bowed to it anyway.

The decision was made.

The Dancing Monkey was going home.

Chapter 1

The Beckoning Unknown



The temple was quiet that morning.

The Dancing Monkey couldn't help but add a little rhythm as he packed. A soft tap-tap-tap of his foot, a gentle hum under his breath, and a flourish as he tied his small bundle. He paused to check that the little wooden box was secure. His paw lingered on it, gaze softening.

A few early-rising students glanced his way, smiling at the familiar sight of the Dancing Monkey doing what he did best: finding the music in the mundane.

Now he stood at the edge of the courtyard, his pack neatly secured, shifting his weight from one foot to the other in a subtle, unconscious dance. The scent of cherry blossoms floated on the breeze. In the distance, the Master sipped his morning tea, watching with that inscrutable half-smile of his.

The Monkey bowed once, deeply, remembering their last conversation.

“So you’re really leaving,” the Master had said the night before. It wasn’t a question, just an acknowledgment.

“It’s time,” the Monkey had replied, surprised by the certainty in his own voice.

The Master nodded, and unusually, repeated himself. “Remember... live, laugh, eat when hungry, rest when tired, meet each moment as it comes... and remember too that wisdom is not something to carry like a stone in your pocket. It’s like the air—felt, but not held.”

“I’ll try to remember,” the Monkey had said, grinning. “Though I’m terrible at remembering air.”

The Master’s laugh had filled the garden; a rare, wonderful sound that made the Monkey feel like he’d won some cosmic prize.

Now, in the morning light, the Monkey took a deep breath and turned toward the path that led away from the temple. He took one step. Then another.

“You know the way back if you forget anything,” called the Master from his tea spot.

The Monkey turned, walking backward. “Like what? Serenity? My non-existent shoes?”

“Like your sense of humor,” the Master replied, eyes twinkling. “Though I see you’ve packed extra.”

The Monkey laughed and gave a theatrical bow without breaking stride, and promptly tripped over a stone, arms pinwheeling as he barely caught his balance.

The Master’s soft chuckle followed him down the path.

Dignity is highly overrated anyway.

The Monkey laughed at his own dramatics.

Behind him, the temple shimmered in the soft light of early morning, half-hidden by mist. Familiar scents wafted in the air... jasmine, osmanthus, and incense clinging to the path like a memory. He could almost hear the soft swish of the Master's robes, the quiet clink of a teacup being placed gently on stone.

The first step wasn't the hardest. Nor the second. It was the third, when the weight of leaving finally settled, a hollowness expanding beneath his ribs, tender and terrifying.

The temple had become more than stone and teaching; it had become safety, certainty, home. And now that certainty was fading with each step, leaving him feeling vulnerable in a way he hadn't expected.

He swallowed hard.

What if this freedom was just another cage? One with no one to guide me when I lose my way?

He paused, holding his breath. His toes curled into the damp earth. For a moment, he nearly turned back.

Just one more day. One more conversation. One more moment beneath the tree.

Then he caught himself and chuckled. "Really?" he said aloud to no one. "Three steps in and already second-guessing? Some Dancing Monkey you are."

Maybe I should've been the Hesitating Hedgehog. Much less pressure.

He laughed to himself.

The leaves rustled above. The wind stirred the trees. Something about the way the branches swayed made his heart skip. The road was waiting... beckoning. Like an open palm.

Somewhere nearby, a bird laughed. A sharp, cheeky cackle that made him look up.

The tiny blue bird flitted from the branches, then cocked its head at him sideways.

The Monkey rubbed his chin, grinning. "We've only just met and you're already judging my timing? At least buy me a mango first."

The bird cocked its head again, unimpressed.

"Fine, fine," he said, adjusting his bundle. "I'm going. See? This is me, going."

He bowed his head to the bird, as though greeting an old friend, then took another step.

The temple disappeared behind him with surprising speed. The road curved, and just like that, it was gone. Swallowed by trees. Wrapped in silence.

As the hours passed, the jungle shifted. Gone was the dense, familiar canopy near the temple. Here, taller trees let light filter through in shifting patterns that danced across the path. Each breeze brought new smells, some sweet, some pungent, all unfamiliar.

His fur prickled.

Again, a part of him wanted to turn back, the part that missed the certainty of the temple's rhythm, the part that resisted the unknown.

A knot formed in his belly.

But then, just as quickly, he noticed something else: the world felt wider, the air felt crisper, the sky larger than he remembered. His heart quickened. Each step forward buzzed with something he couldn't quite name, and he was eager to see what waited beyond.

I'm going home! I'm going to find new places to dance, find rhythms I've never felt, see if I can dance not just in the temple but anywhere. I'm going to live!

The thought made him smile. He did a small, spontaneous pirouette, arms outstretched.

“The Dancing Monkey World Tour,” he declared to a nearby squirrel, who chattered in reply. The Monkey chose to interpret it as enthusiastic approval and gave a deep bow. “Coming soon! The exclusive *Limited Jungle Edition*... now with 40% more slipping and 60% more snack breaks!”

The squirrel darted off, unimpressed.

As the day wore on, the novelty of freedom began to be tempered by the realities of the road. The sun burned hotter. His feet ached. The pack, which had seemed so light at first, now dug into his shoulders.

He looked back, half-expecting the temple to reappear. But it had long vanished. There was no one to guide him now. No Master, no calm voice to offer gentle riddles or unexpected questions. Only the silence of the path and the noise in his head.

What if I take the wrong road?

He dropped onto a rock, chewing on a piece of dried fruit he’d packed. He had no heart for it, and it tasted like cardboard.

Without thinking, he picked up a stick and began drawing in the dirt. Circles. Lines. Nothing special. Just movement. Just presence.

“Worse comes to worst,” he muttered to himself, “I’ll start a dirt-drawing school... *Master Monkey’s Academy of Extremely Temporary Art.*”

The breeze shifted, causing him to pause and look up.

He noticed the sunlight filtering through the rustling leaves, the *komorebi*, dapples of gold flickering gently, creating patterns on the ground, as if the whole world was connected and dancing without effort.

Then he spotted a small beetle dragging a crumb twice its size across the path. It struggled. Stumbled. Slid sideways with every second step. But it kept going.

The Monkey crouched. “That looks impossible,” he whispered.

The beetle did not respond. It just adjusted and kept pushing, legs trembling with effort.

The Monkey watched in silence, mesmerized. From his view, the beetle's path was just a few inches across smooth dirt. But to the tiny creature, it must have seemed an endless expedition across treacherous terrain; each pebble a boulder, each ridge a mountain.

"You're doing the impossible," he said. "One wobble at a time."

Something clicked inside him. Like an understanding beyond words. Perhaps his vast, uncertain journey was simply part of something larger.

Maybe it's not about knowing. Maybe it's just stepping, seeing what happens, one foot at a time.

He nodded to the beetle. "You and me both, little one. The road doesn't ask if we're ready. Only if we'll go."

As he stood, he noticed how the beetle didn't stop to question or look back. It just kept going.

There was wisdom in that. A lesson the temple had tried to teach him, now embodied in the humblest of teachers.

He brushed the dirt from his fur and adjusted his pack. The road still stretched ahead. Still unfamiliar. Still uncertain.

And yet... the wind moved through the trees again, and for the briefest of moments, he felt it, that subtle hum, like the whole forest was breathing with him. Like the path wasn't something outside of him, but something he was becoming.

His fears hadn't vanished. But he saw now that they didn't need to.

They could walk beside him, these doubts and worries. They could come along for the journey.

He stood straighter. Breathed deeper.

Each moment, a choice.

The road beckoned.

With a flick of his tail and a quiet grin, he walked on.

This time, he danced. Not gracefully, more like a leaf trying to remember the steps to a breeze. But it counted.

That's who he was now.

The Dancing Monkey.

Not because he never stumbled or doubted or feared. But because, even when he did, he found his way back to the rhythm.

Step by step. Beat by beat. All the way home.

Pause & Reflect

Where in your life are you between the comfort of the known and the call of the unknown? Can you take the step, even without knowing where it leads?



Next Steps

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