

# KUSALA THE BURMESE MONK

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He was born one spring morning with his eyes open, while his mother was sowing rice in the terraces, up to her knees in water. He was the tenth and last child in his family, so they delighted in all his childhood pranks.

At the age of five his father took him to the local temple to be educated in the Sutras. His teacher looked at him profoundly and gave him the name Kusala, which means "the one who knows how to act."

When he was fourteen and was reciting the Sutras aloud with the other novice monks, he heard the sound of machine guns competing with their voices. Kusala and the other young monks ran to the entrance of the monastery and on the street they saw hundreds of unmoving corpses and injured people screaming for help.

Twenty years later, on an autumn morning, Kusala left the temple in his monk's robes, with a small branch of willow in his hands and joined the flow of thousands of people walking through the streets of Rangoon. The day had arrived when everything would change for his people: no more hunger, injustice, silence. He and the other monks were there to peaceably ask the government to listen to the people. He walked for miles until his bare feet started to bleed, but he felt no pain, infected by the energy of the crowd who were angrily shouting, demanding and chanting. The soldiers started to throw tear gas at the protesters and Kusala saw the mist of gas coming towards him, but he did not run. He also saw how a group of youths, among them a monk, struck a motorcycle with sticks until it burst into flames.

When the bullet entered his body he could only see a very white fluffy cloud floating in an infinitely blue sky and he realized he was lying on his back on the road, with a deep but gentle pain spreading in his chest. A young monk approached to help him and saw that Kusala had died with his eyes open and a smile on his lips.

by Patricia Diaz