

The Tongue-Cut Sparrow

A Japanese Folktale

Once upon a time in Japan, there was an old man who was kind and hard-working. However, his wife was greedy and mean. The couple had no children, but the old man kept a small sparrow as his pet. The man loved the sparrow. The sparrow sang to him and made his days happy and bright. But the old woman complained that the sparrow's chirps gave her a headache.

One day, when the man was taking a walk in the forest, his wife was in the kitchen, cooking dinner. She put some flour in a bowl. She walked away for a minute, and when she came back, she found that the sparrow was sitting in the bowl, eating the flour. The woman was furious! In her anger, she grabbed the sparrow and then grabbed a pair of scissors in her pocket. She cut off the sparrow's tongue. "Now you can't eat my flour!" she yelled angrily.

The sparrow flew away quickly.

A few hours later, the man returned home. "Where's my little sparrow?" the man asked.

"I don't know," said his wife. "He must have flown away."

But the old man knew that the sparrow was his friend, and he knew that the sparrow wouldn't leave without a reason. The old man asked his wife again and again what happened to the sparrow. Finally, the woman told her husband what had happened. The old man was very sad. The next morning, he left the house to go look for the sparrow. He walked a long way. He walked up a mountain, he walked back down the mountain, he crossed over a river, and he walked through a deep forest of trees. He walked for hours and hours, calling out, "Little sparrow, little sparrow! Come back to me, come back to me!"

Finally, he heard the familiar sound of a sparrow chirping. He knew it was his little sparrow! He ran to the sparrow, and the sparrow flew into his hand. The old man was incredibly happy to see his sparrow again. And the sparrow was incredibly happy to see the old man again.

Suddenly, the sparrow started to speak. He said to the man, "I'm so glad to see you! Let me invite you to my house for dinner."

The man was very surprised to hear the sparrow speak, but he replied, "Yes, of course!" And he followed the sparrow to his house. When they got to the sparrow's house, the sparrow showed the old man two boxes. One was a very big box; the other was a small box. "I want to give you a gift," the sparrow told the man. "Please take one of these boxes home with you."

"Thank you so much for your kindness," said the old man. "I'll take the small box because I am old and weak, and I have a long journey home."

So the old man took the small box and left the little sparrow. He walked back through the forest until he reached his home.

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The old woman was furious when she saw her husband. “Where have you been all this time?” she asked. The old man told her what had happened. When he finished telling the story, he showed her the small box. He opened the lid and, to his surprise, saw that it was overflowing with gold and silver coins and expensive jewellery.

The old woman’s eyes lit up with greed. She couldn’t believe it—what an amazing gift! But then, suddenly, she became angry at her husband. “How could you be so stupid?!” she yelled at him. “You should have taken the big box instead of this small one! Then we would have so much more!” Without another word, the woman left the house. She was determined to find the little sparrow and take the big box. She made the same long journey that her husband had just made: she walked up a mountain, back down the mountain, crossed over a river, and walked through a thick forest of trees.

Finally, she found the little sparrow. “Hey!” she yelled out. “I came to get the big box that my husband left here. Where’s the box?”

The sparrow told her to follow him. The sparrow flew to his home, and he showed her the big box. The woman picked it up and left the sparrow’s home without saying thank you.

The box was extremely heavy. It was almost too heavy for the woman to lift. But she lifted it and carried it on her long journey back home: up a mountain, down the mountain, over a river, and through the trees. She struggled to carry the basket, but she kept going, thinking excitedly about all the riches that were waiting for her in the box. Finally, after she had been walking for a long time, she couldn’t control her excitement any longer. She couldn’t wait to open the box. So, she put it down on the ground and opened the lid, her eyes widening with greed. But when she opened the lid, she got a horrible surprise. The box was filled with terrible creatures—snakes, toads, spiders, and bees! They jumped out of the box to attack her.

The woman was so scared that she jumped up and ran all the way home. She found her husband waiting for her, and she told him what had happened.

“I can’t believe that stupid sparrow would do something so awful and horrible!” the woman cried.

But the man interrupted her before she could say anything more. “No!” he said. “The sparrow is kind and good. It was your greed that caused this problem.”

The woman realized her husband was right. And from that day on, she changed her ways. She was no longer greedy and mean. Instead, she learned to be kind to all the people and animals around her. She and the old man lived the rest of their days together happily. And they always fed all the sparrows that came near their house.