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Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

The Teakettle

Long ago, as I have heard, there lived in the Morinji temple in the province of Kotsuke a saintly priest.

Three things were remarkable about this worthy man.

Firstly, he practised meditations and loved ceremonies, forms and doctrines. He was a great man for the Holy Sutras and knew much of strange and mystical matters.

Moreover, he had a fine taste himself. Nothing pleased him so much as the ancient tea-ceremony Cha-no-yu, which is a Japanese tradition in which the drinking of tea is elevated to an art form. He also knew both sides of a copper coin well enough and loved a bargain.

So, no one was so pleased as he when he found an old teakettle one day. The kettle was rusty and dirty and stood half-forgotten in a corner of a poor shop in a back street of his town.

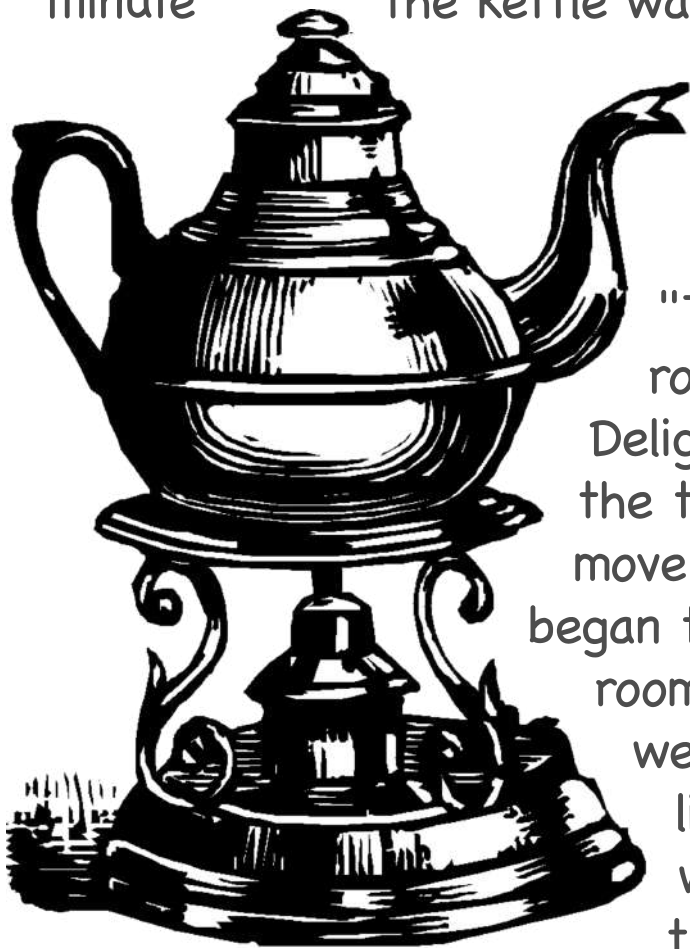
"It is an ugly piece of old metal," said the saint to the shopkeeper, "but it will be good enough to boil my humble drop of water in the evening. I will give you three rin for it (a rin is a Japanese coin)." So he did, and he took the kettle, delighted, home. The kettle was a fine piece, made of bronze and exactly suited to the Cha-no-yu.

A beginner scrubbed and polished the kettle until it shone again and looked as beautiful as you can imagine. The priest turned the kettle over and held it upside down. He looked in it and tapped it with his fingernail.

He smiled. "A bargain," he cried, "a bargain!" and rubbed his hands. He placed the kettle on a chest covered with a purple cloth. He looked at it so long that he rubbed his eyes and then closed them completely. His head drooped and he slept.

And then, believe me, something wonderful happened. The teakettle moved, although there was no hand near it. A hairy head, with two bright eyes, looked out of the spout. The lid jumped up and down. Then four brown, hairy legs and a fine bushy tail appeared. Within a minute

the kettle was out of the box and going round and round the room, looking at everything around it.



"This is a very comfortable room," said the teakettle.

Delighted to be so well housed, the teakettle soon began to move and dance skillfully. He also began to sing heartily. In the next room, three or four novices were studying. "The old man is lively," they said, "listen, what can he be doing?" And they laughed in their

sleeves.

But, by the grace of heaven, what did they hear then? The teakettle made terrible noises: bang, bang, thump, thump, thump!

The novices quickly stopped laughing. One of them slid the paper curtain aside and peered through.

"Oh, the devil and all is inside," he moaned. "The master's old teakettle has turned into some kind of badger. May the Gods protect us from witchcraft, otherwise we will be lost."

"And I was rummaging in it less than an hour ago," said another novice, and he fell on his knees to recite the Holy Sutras. A third novice laughed. "I would like to examine that strange creature more closely," he said. So, most of the newcomers quickly left their books behind and chased after the teapot to catch it. But would they succeed? They didn't have the slightest chance. The teapot laughed and jumped and flew into the air. The newcomers rushed in all directions, slipping on the mats. They got hot and out of breath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the masterful teapot, "catch me if you can"! Soon the priest woke up. He was still drowsy from sleep. "What is this noise?" he said, "it disturbs me during my sacred meditations and rituals."

"Master, master," cried the newcomers, gasping with excitement as they raised their eyebrows in amazement. "Your teapot is enchanted. It was nothing less than a badger instead of a teapot. And no one would believe it, but the teapot even made us dance."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the priest, "enchanted? Not in the least. Look, it's just standing on its box, exactly where I placed it. It's a nice quiet peaceful teapot."

And indeed, the teapot was just standing there and looking as innocent as can be. There wasn't even a hair

of a badger nearby. Now it was the newcomers who looked foolish.

"A likely story indeed," said the priest. "I have heard of a pestle that grew wings and flew away, bidding farewell to its mortar. That is easy for any human to understand. But a teapot turning into a badger? No, no, I have never heard of such a thing. Come, return to your books, my sons. And pray to be saved from the dangers of illusion."

That same night, the holy man filled the teapot with water from the spring and put it on the charcoal fire. He wanted to boil water for his cup of tea. When the water began to boil, the teapot cried out: "Ouch, ouch, the heat of the Great Hell, Ouch, Ouch!" The teapot wasted no time and jumped off the fire as fast as it could.

"Witchcraft," cried the priest. "Black magic! A Devil, a Devil, a Devil! Help, help, help, please be merciful to me." The dear good man was terrified. All the newcomers came running to see what was going on.

"The teapot is enchanted," gasped the old man. "The teapot has become a badger, it is definitely a badger... it speaks and jumps around the room."

"No, master," said a newcomer, "look, the teapot is just sitting quietly on its box. It is a good and silent thing. No, master, the teapot is not enchanted." And indeed, it was, the teapot was just sitting quietly on its box.

"Reverend sir," said the newcomer, "let us all pray to be saved from the dangers of illusion."

The priest sold the teapot to a kettle mender and got twenty copper coins for it. "It's a mighty fine piece of

bronze," said the priest. "Watch, I give it to you, but I cannot tell you why you are the lucky one." Ah, the kettle mender was up for a bargain. He was a happy man now and carried the teapot home. He turned the teapot upside down and looked inside.

"A beautiful piece," said the kettle-mender, "a truly good bargain." That night, before going to bed, he placed the kettle beside him so he would be the first to see it in the morning. He woke up at midnight and went to look at the kettle by the bright light of the moon. Soon the kettle began to move, although there was no hand nearby. "Strange," said the kettle-mender, but he was a man who took things as they came. A furry head with two bright eyes looked out of the spout of the kettle. The lid jumped up and down. Four brown, hairy legs and a fine, bushy tail appeared. It came very close to the kettle-mender and placed a paw on him.

"What is going on?" said the kettle-mender. "I have no ill intentions," said the tea kettle. "No?" asked the kettle-mender. "But I like to be treated well. I am a tea kettle from a badger," said the tea kettle.

"Yes, so it seems," said the kettle-mender. "They laughed at me in the temple, they beat me, and they put me in the fire. I couldn't stand that, you know," said the kettle. "But I do like your spirit," said the kettle-mender. "I think you'll feel at home with me." - "Should I keep you in a lacquered box?" asked the kettle-mender.

"Don't bother, keep me with you. Let's talk occasionally. I love a pipe. I like to eat rice, beans, and sweet things."

"Sometimes a cup of rice wine too?" said the kettle-mender. "Well, now that you mention it," said the tea kettle. "I'll pour it for you," said the kettle-mender. "Thank you kindly," said the tea kettle. "And to start with, would you mind if I share your bed? The night has become a bit cold."

"I have no problem with that at all," said the kettle-mender. The kettle-mender and the tea kettle became best friends. They ate and talked together. The tea kettle had knowledge of many things and was very good company.

One day the tea kettle asked, "Are you poor?" - "Yes," said the kettle-mender, "moderately poor."

"Well, I have an idea that could make you very happy. For a kettle, I am exceptionally talented." - "I certainly believe that," said the kettle-mender. "My name is Bumbuku-Chagama. I am the Prince of the Badger Tea Kettles."

"I will be your servant, my Lord," said the kettle-mender. "If you want to follow my advice," said the tea kettle, "start a real show with me. I really have very special talent, and I believe you could make a lot of money that way."

"That would be hard work for you, my dear Bumbuku," said the kettle-mender.

"Not at all; let's start immediately," said the tea kettle. So they did. The kettle-mender bought curtains for a theater and called the show "Bumbuku-Chagama."

People came from far and wide to see the fun. For the miraculous and most talented tea kettle ever danced and sang. He even balanced on a tight rope. The kettle

performed all sorts of tricks and was so funny that people laughed so hard their bellies hurt. It was a real treat to see the tea kettle, as graceful as a gentleman, bow at the end of the show and thank the people for their patience.

The "Bumbuku-Chagama" show was the talk of the countryside. Even the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie came to see it. As for the kettle maker, he fanned himself in the heat and collected the money. You can believe that he became fat and rich from it. He even went to the court where the great ladies and the royal princesses admired the beautiful kettle.

Finally, the kettle maker retired from work. Then the teakettle came to him with tears in its bright eyes. "I am very afraid that it is time for me to leave you," it said. "Don't say that, my dear Bumbuku," said the kettle maker. "We will be so happy now that we are rich together."

"I have come to the end of my time," said the teakettle. "You will no longer see the old Bumbuku, from now on I will be an ordinary kettle, nothing more or less."

"Oh my dear Bumbuku, what should I do now?" cried the poor man. "I think I would like to be given to the Morinji temple as a very sacred treasure," said the teakettle.

After those words, the kettle never spoke or moved again. The kettle maker presented the teakettle as a very sacred treasure to the temple, giving away half of his wealth.

And the teakettle remained famous for many years and was honored. Some people even worshiped the teakettle as if it were a saint.

