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The Old Man Who Made Trees Blossom

Unknown writer

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago by the river lived two old men. One lived upstream and the other downstream. That's why they were called Upstream and Downstream. The big difference between the two neighbours was that Upstream was a selfish nasty man and Downstream friendly and generous.

One day, both men put a fishtrap in the river. The first thing the next morning, impatient Upstream went to check the trap, but there were only twigs in his trap. Immediately he wanted to know if his neighbour had the same bad luck, but to his surprise the trap of Downstream was full of fish! Quickly, Upstream changed traps with his neighbour.

When Downstream went to check his trap, he saw the strange catch. But he didn't mind, because now he didn't have to go and chop wood. When he tried to chop a big willow root into smaller chunks, to his surprise it just fell apart. What was even stranger was that a little dog jumped out of it!

Downstream and his wife took good care of the dog. Even though they had little food, they always gave half to the dog. The dog soon became big and strong. One morning the dog said with a human voice, "Father, come join me into the forest today. Tie a basket on my back and we can go." Downstream was dumbfounded, but he listened to the dog and they left together.

The old man got tired quickly. The dog saw this and said, "You have always taken such good care of me, put the things you are holding into my basket and you also climb in. I can carry you." The old man resisted for a moment, but soon obliged. On their way the dog and Downstream shared the food he had brought. A little while later the dog stood still. "Father, here you should dig!," and the man started to dig. To his surprise he found a pot full of gold! Over the moon, he brought it home to his wife.



Shortly after, their neighbour Upstream, found out about their luck. He asked if he could borrow their dog and kind as Downstream was he agreed. But Upstream was very mean to the dog. He sat on the dog's back without asking

and gave it no food. So instead of leading him to a pot of gold, the dog led Upstream to a pot of trash. Upstream got so angry that he killed the dog. Downstream and his wife were heartbroken and made the sweet dog a beautiful grave. They put a willow branch on the grave so that they would always be able to find it. But the branch didn't remain a branch, within a year it had grown into a beautiful, big tree.

Downstream enjoyed sitting underneath the tree. On a warm autumn day he suddenly heard the voice of his dog from within the tree. "Cut down this tree and turn it into a mortar for the rice." The old man immediately obeyed. He would have a nice keepsake to remember his dog by. When the mortar was done, he gave it to his wife. She put a little rice in it and to her surprise the amount of rice doubled! It turned into so much rice that it was streaming down onto the ground.

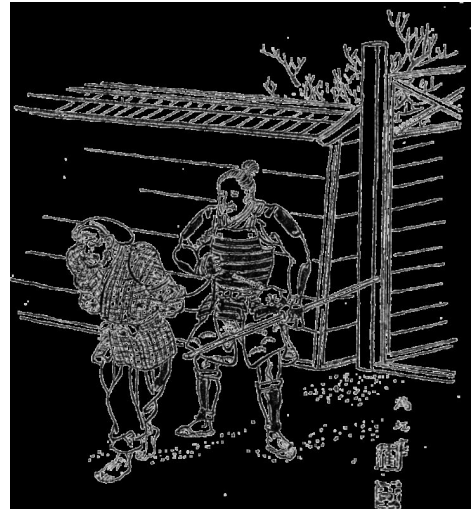
At that moment, the wife of Upstream knocked on the door. She saw the rice and wanted to try out the magic mortar. She took the mortar home and put rice in it. But instead of doubling the amount of rice, it started to get less and less. This made Upstream so angry, that he chopped the mortar into pieces and burned it.

When Downstream came to collect his mortar, he was shocked to hear what his neighbours had done with his keepsake. He asked if they had kept the ashes and took those home. As he was walking home, a gust of wind swept some of the ashes into the garden. And everywhere where the ashes hit the trees, the trees started blooming. "I have to show this to the king!," he thought. The king was known for his love of the blossoms of the cherry blossom trees. He would surely love this!



In the royal garden, Downstream ran into the king. "I am the old man who lets trees bloom," he said. The king was eager to see it for himself. Downstream threw some ashes on the trees and indeed they started blooming! The king thought it was so beautiful that he rewarded Downstream with beautiful clothing.

When Upstream heard about this, he became jealous again. So he took some of the ashes and brought it to the queen. “I am the man who lets trees bloom,” he said. “In exchange for beautiful clothes, I will make the entire garden blossom.” He threw the ashes onto the trees, but nothing happened. What did happen was that a small part of the ashes blew into the eye of the queen, who started crying in pain. Immediately two big guards arrested the nasty old man and threw him in jail, where he would stay for the rest of his life.



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