

The Badger and Rabbit

There was once an old man, who with his wife, lived at the foot of the mountains in the province of Ontario, in Japan. The old couple owned a small piece of land, which, by careful terracing and irrigating, they made to produce a fair crop of rice each year.

This, with the proceeds from the wood they gathered upon the mountain side, was their whole living. Although they were poor, they were well known for their honesty and their good nature.

Now, the old man's farm had suffered considerably from the depredations of a Badger who had his hole near the farmer's house. Although the old man was kind and long-suffering, he grew very angry at last, and finally set a trap, in which the Badger was taken prisoner. Carrying him home in high spirits, he tried out:

"Harrah, wife! I have captured the trespasser. I will tie his legs together and hang him to a rafter. Keep a sharp watch on him, and this evening he will make soup for our supper." So saying, he went away to his work.

The Badger, hanging there until he became stiff and sore, racked his brain to discover some means of escape. At length a plan occurred to him, so he said kindly to the old woman, who was hulling rice by pounding it in a mortar:

"Madam, you are old and weak and the work of lifting this heavy pestle is too much for you. I am ashamed to be hanging here idle, and watching you laboring so hard. Let me pound the rice for you."

The old woman was tired, and felt very much in need of a rest, but she feared that if she untied the Badger, he would escape. So she said:

"No, I will not let you help me. If I should unbind you, you would run away to the woods, and then my husband would blame me for letting you go."

But the Badger continued in a gentle tone:

"Madam, you are right. I made that mischief, was caught and bound, and now I ought to be punished. I will not run away. When you see your husband returning, you may tie me again as before, and he will never know the difference. You will not be blamed for anything. I do not propose to escape, but to help you with your work."

The good old woman, convinced by his fair promises, untied the cord with which he was bound, leaving only his hind feet fastened. Handing her the pestle, she said:

"Here, take my place now."

The Badger, being now free to use his hands, sprang upon her and beat her upon the head with the pestle until she was dead. Not content with this cruelty he planned to make soup of the old woman, and to serve it to her husband when he should return from his work.

When the soup was made the Badger dressed himself in the old woman's clothes, and disguised himself so that he looked exactly like her. Then he sat down to await the farmer's return.

When the old man, knowing nothing of what had occurred in his absence, came home in the evening, the Badger said to him:

"I have been waiting a long time for you. Here is a nice bowl of Badger soup ready for you."

After the farmer had taken off his straw sandals, and had washed himself, he sat down before the table and began eating. When he had eaten several cups of the soup the Badger suddenly resumed his original form and cried out:

"You are eating your wife. Look at the bones upon the floor." And, laughing derisively, he ran away.

When the old man had recovered from his first astonishment he fell down, crying bitterly:

"My wife has been made into soup! I must avenge her death! Oh, what a wicked Badger!"

While he was thus mourning, the Rabbit, who lived near his house, came in. The Rabbit, unlike the Badger, was a good, kind-hearted animal.

As the old man was well acquainted with the Rabbit he told him all that had happened. When he had heard the story the Rabbit comforted the old man, saying:

"Now, we must not spend our time weeping. First, we must bury the corpse. Then I will see that your wife's death is properly avenged upon the Badger, so you must be patient for a little while."

Feeling greatly encouraged the farmer replied:

"Though you and the Badger are both animals, yet what a difference there is between you. You are honest and kind; the Badger is cunning and cruel. He committed a wicked and unjust deed in killing my wife, and for this he should meet a bad end. But I am sure he will be properly punished by you, so I am satisfied."

"Be assured I shall kill him in a few days," said the Rabbit, returning to his home.

He at once set out to hunt for the Badger who, fearing the farmer would discover him, had hidden at the bottom of a deep hole. The Rabbit went to the Badger's home and, finding him hidden there, called out:

"Mr. Badger, are you sick? Why do you not go out this fine day? Would you not like to go to the mountains and cut hay?"

The Badger, hearing the Rabbit's voice, and thinking he had nothing to fear from him, replied:

"That will be pleasant. I am tired of this hole, anyway. Let us go at once."

So they set off together to cut the hay. They walked about the mountains all day and had a very pleasant time. In the evening they made the hay they had cut into two bundles, which they tied upon their backs and started for home.

The Rabbit always carried with him a couple of flints with which to strike fire. On the way he dropped behind and struck them together in order to set fire to the hay on the Badger's back. The Badger heard the sound and asked:

"What is that?"

"I made the noise to frighten the evil spirits that are in Kachi Kachi mountain," replied the Rabbit.

When the hay upon his back began to crackle and blaze, the Badger leaped and rolled on the ground, crying:

"Help! Help! Help!"

"That's dangerous," said the Rabbit, apparently with great concern, but urging on the flames with his fan.

The Badger, shrieking with pain, fled to his house. The next day as he was lying on his bed, suffering from the burns, the Rabbit visited him and asked sympathetically after his hurts.

"I have heard that plaster mixed with soy and red pepper is wonderfully good for burns," said he, "so I have brought some with me. Will you let me apply it?"

"Thank you," replied the Badger. Do so if you think it will help me."

The Rabbit, therefore, spread the plaster upon the burns, but of course it made the pain twice as great as before, and the Badger yelled and tumbled about in agony.

A few days afterward when the Badger's wounds had almost healed, the Rabbit again hunted him up and tried to persuade him to go into the mountains. The Badger refused to do so. He finally agreed, however, to go out on the sea the next day.

The Rabbit then went home and set to work to build two boats for their proposed excursion. One of these he made, as usual, of wood, and the other of clay. When they were finished and painted black, it would take a close look to tell one from the other.

When they came to the seashore the Rabbit got into the wooden boat and the Badger unsuspectingly got into the clay one. When they had rowed out a little way from shore the Rabbit said:

"Mr. Badger, the scenery is very beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes," was the reply, "and as the weather is fine and the sea calm, I think we shall have a pleasant time."

"That is true," said the Rabbit, "but there is little pleasure in merely rowing aimlessly about. What do you say to a race?"

"That will be fun," replied the Badger.

"Very well, are you ready?" called the Rabbit. "One, two, three"—and the boats rushed off.

But the Badger's boat, having soaked up the water until it was soft began, at this extra effort, to fall to pieces.

"My boat is sinking!" he cried in alarm. "Help! Help! Wait, Mr. Rabbit!"

Then the Rabbit stopped rowing and said:

"You are a thief and a murderer. You robbed my friend the old farmer and then you made soup of his wife. Do you not know that such a crime must always be punished? Now I will avenge the old woman's death, in the place of her poor old husband. Your burns, on Kachi Kachi, and this thing which you thought an accident, are the punishments for your evil deeds."

So saying he gave the Badger a great blow upon the head with his

paddle, and the Badger and his broken boat sank into the sea together.

When the Rabbit returned to the old man's house and told him what he had done, the farmer was so gratified that he took the Rabbit into his home and fed and loved him as he would his own son — Capt. C. E. Hampton, U.S.A.

Old Fable in New Form

Hull, Que., April 17.—A settler on the upper Mattawa river, who caught a wolf last winter, had read that ships were sometimes cleared of rats by fastening a bell around the neck of one of them. And the bright idea occurred to him that in a similar manner he might clear the adjacent woods of wolves. He fastened a bell on his wolf's neck and released him.

After the snow had pretty well gone, he allowed his little flock of sheep to exercise their lambs in the fields near the house. His children were with their father looking at the gambols of the lambs, when the sheep were noticed to prick up their ears as though intently listening. Then with much bleating the whole flock raced to the woods.

Wondering at the vagaries of the animals, the farmer went about his work. About an hour later the children came to him with the news that the sheep had returned, but had left one of the lambs behind them.

The next day the same thing occurred again, and another lamb disappeared. The children tried to keep the sheep in the fields but failing, followed them into the bush. They reported that they had distinctly heard a bell tinkling in the distance.

Then it began to dawn upon the farmer that the bell he had fastened to the neck of his gray wolf visitor, was the same which was borne by the father of the flock in the previous summer. The quick eared sheep had recognized the sound of the bell and true to their instincts had hastened to join their last year's companion.

That they found not exactly a wolf in sheep's clothing, but a wolf attached to a sheep's bell, and ready to take advantage of his condition to dine on spring lamb was no fault of theirs, though certainly their misfortune. The settler does not appear to think very much of the bell plan of disposing of wolves.

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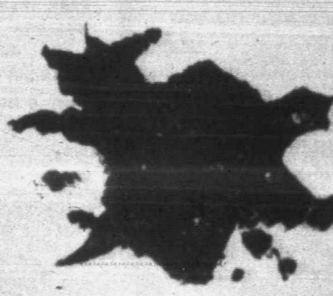
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