



STORY: MOMOTARO, THE PEACH BOY, A TALE FROM JAPAN

Retold by Dianne de Las Casas

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There once lived a kind woodcutter and his wife. More than anything, they prayed for a child. One day, when the woodcutter went into the forest to work, the old woman went to the river to wash clothes. As she was washing, she saw a giant peach floating down the river.

She reached in and pulled out the peach. “What a fine peach you are,” she said. “My husband will be very pleased to see you.”

She brought the giant peach home. The woodcutter was delighted, “We have been blessed. I cannot wait to taste this delectable fruit!”

He was about to carve the peach with a knife when a voice inside cried out, “Wait, don’t cut me!”

The astonished woodcutter dropped his knife when the peach split apart and a little boy stood in front of him and his wife. The boy said, “I have been sent to you in answer to your prayers.”

The woodcutter and his wife were delighted. They named the boy Momotaro, which means Boy-of-the-Peach. Momotaro grew up to be a fine young boy. When he was fifteen, he said, “Mother and father, you have been good parents. Now I must venture off on my own to help my country. Not far from here is Oni Island, the land of the ogres. I must find a way to defeat the Oni so that they will stop terrorizing our people.”

Though the woodcutter and his wife were sad to see their son leave, they knew in their hearts that he would return. Before Momotaro left, his mother packed him some millet dumplings.

Momotaro began traveling to Oni Island. Along the way, he stopped for a bit to eat. As he ate his millet dumplings, he saw a spotted dog. The dog barked, “Rof, rof, rof!” Momotaro offered the dog his dumplings and the dog ate happily.

When he finished eating, the dog asked, “Where are you going?”

Momotaro said, “I am going to Oni Island to defeat the ogres.”

“Then I will come with you,” said the dog. “You will need help.”

They began traveling to Oni Island when they happened upon a monkey. The monkey chattered, “Kia, kia, kia!”

The spotted dog growled at the monkey and the two began to quarrel. Momotaro said, “Stop it, both of you. We need to go.”

The monkey asked, “Where are you going?”

Momotaro said, “We are going to Oni Island to defeat the ogres.”

“Then I will come with you,” said the dog. “You will both need help.”

They began traveling to Oni Island when a pheasant jumped out in front of them. The pheasant cried, “Chi, chi, chi!” The dog and the monkey were about to attack the pheasant when Momotaro said, “Stop it, all of you. Eat some millet dumplings. We need to go.”

The animals happily gobbled up the millet dumplings. The pheasant asked, “Where are you going?”

Momotaro said, “We are going to Oni Island to defeat the ogres.”

“Then I will come with you,” said the pheasant. “You will all need help.”

During the journey, a strange thing happened. The three animals, who did not normally get along, became friends. They arrived at the sea’s edge and Momotaro and the animals built a boat. They crossed the ocean to Oni Island, the land of the ogres.

As they approached the island, they saw the ugly ogres. Momotaro announced, “Surrender now before you regret it!”

The ogres laughed, “Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! You will never defeat us, little peach boy with your puny animal army! Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!”

The ogres underestimated the power of determination. Momotaro and his friends charged the ogres. The pheasant pecked at them, the monkey scratched at them, and the dog bit their legs. Momotaro waved his sword high and asked, “Now will you surrender?”

The ogres wearily agreed. They were defeated by Momotaro and his animal friends. The ogres surrendered and promised to stop terrorizing the people of Japan. They also presented Momotaro with the most wonderful treasure you can imagine – gold, silver, precious jewels, and magic objects.

Momotaro loaded their boat with the treasure and returned home. Momotaro and his friends were celebrated heroes. They had their friendship and all the millet dumplings they could eat. From that time on, their lives were just, well, peachy.

