



STORY: THE SINGING TURTLE, A TALE FROM JAPAN

Retold By Dianne de Las Casas

Illustration by Philip Chow

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In the land of the rising sun, there lived two brothers. One was hard-working and the other was lazy. The hard-working brother cared for his sick mother, fixing her supper even after a long day working in the rice fields.

On the other hand, the lazy brother was never satisfied with anything and always complained. No matter how hard the other brother worked, the family never had any money because the lazy brother spent it all.

One day, the hard-working brother said to his mother, “I am going into town to sell this wood to make us some money. When I return, I will make us supper.”

The lazy brother just yawned and lay in bed. Their mother said, “Don’t work too hard, son.”

The hard-working brother went into town and stayed all day. Unfortunately, he did not sell a single stick. Discouraged, he began traveling back home through the forest. He sat down in front of a tree near a pond where he often ate lunch.

He began to cry. “I have not sold a single stick! My family will have no supper tonight!”

Suddenly, he heard a voice. “Why are you crying?”

The young man looked around and saw no one. The voice spoke again, “Your nose is running. You better wipe it.”

Surprised, the young man looked around again. “Who is speaking?” he asked.

“I am,” said the voice. “Look down.”

The brother looked down and saw a small turtle. He dried his tears and wiped his nose on his sleeve. “I didn’t know turtles could talk!” he said, surprised.

The turtle replied, “Not only can I talk, I can sing too! Anyway, why were you crying?”

The young man told the turtle the whole story. When he was finished, the turtle said, "Since you have fed me so often, it is my turn to feed you."

The brother said, "I don't want to eat you! Besides, I have never fed you before."

The turtle laughed. "No, silly! That's not what I meant. I will sing for you when you bring me into town. People will pay to hear me sing. You can keep the money. It is my gift to you since I have been eating your leftovers and crumbs every time you eat your lunch here."

So the young man agreed and took the turtle into town. The turtle was right. Though turtle did not sing very well, people dropped many coins in the basket to hear him sing because it was such a strange and wondrous sight to see and hear a turtle singing.

When the young man returned home, he introduced his mother to the turtle and told her the whole story. She said, "You are a fine turtle! Thank you for your kindness!"

The next day, the hard-working brother was bathing the turtle. The lazy brother said, "Give me that turtle. I bet I could bring home more money than you!" He snatched the turtle from his brother and ran into town.

When the townspeople gathered, the lazy brother bragged about how the turtle could sing. The townspeople dropped their coins in the basket and waited for turtle's song. But the turtle wouldn't open his mouth. He refused to sing, remaining silent.

The lazy brother began to yell, "Sing, turtle sing!" But still, turtle stayed quiet and retreated into his shell.

The townspeople began to yell, "Give us our money back. That's just an ordinary turtle. You tricked us!" They were so angry that they chased him out of town.

Turtle walked home to the family's house. The mother and the hard-working brother were so glad to see the turtle. Turtle told them the story. Mother said, "Just as greed and laziness chase good away, so does good chase greed and laziness away."

The mother and hard-working brother invited Turtle to live with them and Turtle sang happily for the rest of his days. They always had enough to eat and their lives were filled with laughter and song.