



JAPANESE FOLKTALE – OMUSUBI KORORIN ROLLING RICE BALLS

Long, long ago there lived a good old man and his wife in a village. They were nice and honest, and worked hard, so people called them Good Old Couple. One day, as usual, the old man went to a hill to gather firewood. He carried a big rice ball that his wife made. (An omusubi in Japanese) After working hard all morning, he felt hungry.



After work was his favourite time to eat a rice ball. He sat on a stump nearby and grabbed the big rice ball to eat. When he was about to eat, the rice ball slipped out of his hands, and fell down to the ground. Look! It started rolling down along the slope.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, my rice ball. It's the rice ball my wife made," crying, the old man was running after it. But it kept rolling down so fast that he couldn't catch it. Then it fell into a big hole at the end of the slope.

"Oh, I've never noticed there's such a big hole here," he said. He looked down into the hole. Just then a song came out of it.

"Rice ball rolling down. Rolling, rolling down." The song was so pleasant and beautiful that he leaned over the edge of the hole to listen to it better. He stuck his ear to the hole, and tried to listen attentively. But the music was over. He stuck his head deeper into the hole, and---he himself slipped down into it. This time the song he heard was like this.

"Old man rolling down. Rolling, rolling down."



He looked around. The place he was sitting was surely the bottom of the hole. But it looked like a big hall. And can you believe this? There were lots of mice working there. One of white mice came near him, and said,

"Welcome to our place, Old man. Thank you so much for giving us that big rice ball. Maybe your wife made it. We all are glad to have it. We'll serve you lunch in return."

All the mice were working happily. Singing a song, they were making rice cakes. (Rice cakes are called mochi, and are essential for happy occasions in Japan.) Their working song was like this,

"If there's no cat, our place will be peaceful. We love peace in the world of mice. Yo-ho, yo-ho-ho."

Before long, just-made rice cakes and some food were served in front of him.

The moment he bit a cake, he said, "This is the most delicious rice cake I've ever had in my life." And he ate all the food they served. Then the mouse brought a small but beautiful box. Handing it to him, the mouse said,

"This is for your wife. Would you tell her how we liked her rice ball? We all appreciate it."

In the meantime his wife had started worrying about her husband who was a little late in returning home. When he came back with the box, she cried with relief. Soothing her, the man told her why he couldn't come home earlier. And opened the box he brought. Look! There were some coins and jewellery in the box. It must be a mouse-treasure box.

The story doesn't end at this point. There lived another old couple next door to the good old couple's house. As you can imagine they weren't nice and honest, and didn't work hard, either. They overheard the neighbour's conversation and wanted to get a box like theirs.



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The next morning, the other old man went to the same hill with a big rice ball his wife made. He looked around for the hole he had heard about. From the top of the hill to the bottom of the slope, he searched the ground for the hole. He finally found it at the end of the slope. "This must be that hole," he said to himself. And he dropped his rice ball into the hole. Soon that song came out of the hole.

"Rice ball rolling down, rolling, and rolling down." He chuckled to himself, but he couldn't hear the last line of the song. He slipped into the hole. He hit the bottom of it with a thud. He looked around and saw a lot of mice singing and making rice cakes. "I'm sure this must be the place," he said to himself. He listened to the song for a while. The mice just cast a glance at the old man, and were working busily. Singing the song, they were making rice cakes.



"If there's no cat, our place will be peaceful. We love peace in the world of mice. Yo-ho, yo-ho-ho." It occurred to him that he could get mice-treasure if he pretended to be a cat. He took a deep breath, and said, "Meow, meow."

Suddenly the atmosphere changed. All the mice froze like fossils for a moment. The next moment one of them shouted, "A cat! A cat's coming in!" Another mouse ordered, "Don't let him in. Close the entrance."

All the mice started moving quickly. The place was getting chaotic. Soon it became dark and quiet. The old man was left alone and completely stunned in the darkness. He couldn't think of what he had to do next. The fear of death, however, brought him back. He started to dig and dig up desperately with his bare hands to escape from the world of mice.

His wife was too old to walk without a stick, but her expectation for a mouse-treasure box was too big to wait for him at home. With her stick in her hand, she started walking to the hill. When she reached the foot of the hill, she became so tired that she couldn't keep walking. Against her will, she stopped there for a while. Then she noticed that a part of the ground in front of her was swelling and moving. "That must be the mole that damages our field. I hate it. I'll teach it a good lesson," she said. She began to beat the spot with her stick with all her strength.

"Stop it, please. Ouch! Ouch!" crying, her husband jumped up from the mud. The poor old woman was paralyzed with shock to see that the bad old man appeared covered with mud. What was worse was that he'd got some bumps on his head. They both couldn't say anything for a while.

WEBSITE SOURCE: <http://www.geocities.co.jp/HeartLand-Gaien/7211/kudos9/omusubi.html>



JAPANESE FOLKTALE: SANMEI NO OFUDA – THREE CHARMS AND THE MOUNTAIN WITCH

Once upon a time, there was a young apprentice who lived in a temple in the mountains. He was a mischievous boy and enjoyed playing pranks. He didn't train very hard and would often take naps or cause trouble for the head priest by chasing rabbits around.

One autumn day, when the leaves were changing colour, the young apprentice saw that the chestnut trees in the mountains were beginning to bear fruit. The chestnuts looked very delicious.

"Master, I want to eat the chestnuts on that mountain over there. Can I go and pick some?"

"No, people say there's a mountain witch living there. You'll be eaten."

"Oh, that can't really be true. I'm sure someone just made that up. Please let me go."

The priest shook his head at the boy who wouldn't do as he was told and said, "OK, it might do a mischievous young lad like you some good to be scared for once. You can go, but if you meet the witch, use these." The priest handed the boy three lucky paper charms. The apprentice took them and immediately scurried off toward the mountain.

When he reached the mountain the boy found many ripe chestnuts, just as he had thought. He became so absorbed in gathering them that he completely forgot about the time. He didn't notice the sun going down, and before he knew it, it had become pitch dark. "It feels a bit spooky when it's this dark. What will I do if the mountain witch really came out?" Just as he was thinking this, he suddenly heard a voice behind him.

"Well, well. Hello there, young boy."

Still thinking about the witch, the apprentice jumped with fright, but when he turned round he saw a gentle-looking old woman. "Have you come to pick chestnuts? Why don't you come to my house? I'll cook them for you to eat."

The boy was very hungry and happily followed the old woman home. He ate chestnuts until he was so full that he grew sleepy and dozed off. He woke up in the middle of the night, not knowing how long he'd been asleep, and found that the old woman was not there. He heard a strange noise coming from the next room. Puzzled, he peeped into the room and saw the frightful-looking mountain witch sharpening a knife.

"Aaaaah!" he screamed, horrified. The witch looked up and glared at him.

"You saw me, didn't you, boy? That's right, I'm a mountain witch. And now I'm going to eat you." As she said this, the witch tried to grab the youth.

Panicking, he said, "Uh . . . OK. But first let me go to the toilet. I'm going to wet myself if I don't go."

"Well, all right, I suppose. But I'm going to tie you up with rope and go with you so you can't escape."

The boy entered the toilet tied up with rope. The witch stood guard outside the door.



"Aren't you finished yet?"

"Just a little more. Wait a minute!" answered the boy, but he knew he couldn't keep this up forever.

"What shall I do? Ah! Of course! I can use the paper charm the priest gave me to escape!" he thought. The boy attached one of the charms to the wall of the toilet and asked it to help him: "Oh lucky charm, please pretend to be me and answer the witch."

He snuck out of the toilet window and fled as fast as he could toward the temple.

"Boy! Haven't you finished? You're very slow!" the witch continued to shout, thinking the boy was still inside. "Just a little more. Wait a minute!" answered the charm in the boy's voice. The witch began to get suspicious since every time she asked the boy to hurry up, the same answer would come back. Finally, she couldn't wait any longer and peered inside. The boy was gone. "That rascal! He cheated me! He'll regret this!" fumed the angry witch and began to chase after the boy.

"Whoa, that was close," said the boy to himself as he ran, calming down a little. Then he looked back.

"Stop where you are, boy! I'm going to eat you now!" The witch looked even scarier now that she was angry and was chasing him very fast.

"Oh no! If she catches me I'm dead! Lucky charm, please make a river appear behind me." As he made this wish to the second charm, suddenly a big river appeared, and the witch was swallowed up in its current.

"The witch will surely drown in that," sighed the boy in relief. But as soon as he thought this, the witch used her magic powers to swallow all the water in the river and started chasing him again.

"Oh no! This time make me a sea of fire," asked the boy to his last paper charm. Suddenly, a sea of fire appeared behind him and enveloped the witch. But the witch blew out all the water she had just swallowed, putting out the fire, and once again ran after him.

"I'm finished! She's going to catch me now," thought the boy as he ran for his life. But he scampered quickly enough to reach the temple just before the witch. "Master, please help me! The mountain witch is chasing me. She's right outside!"

"Ah, so you met her, did you? Have you learned your lesson?"

The boy thought about what had happened and asked the priest to forgive him. "I'm sorry, Master. From now on I'll be better behaved." Then he hurriedly hid inside a large jar.

No sooner had the boy hidden himself than the witch kicked down the temple door and barged inside.

"Hey, priest! Where's the boy who ran in here? Bring him out at once!"

The priest pretended not to know anything: "What? What are you talking about? I've been sitting here eating rice cakes. I haven't seen any boy." This just made the witch even angrier.

"You can pretend you don't know. That makes no difference to me, since I'll eat you instead if you won't give me the boy," said the witch, now very agitated.



"All right, but first let's see which one of us is better at turning ourselves into different shapes," challenged the priest. "If you win, you can do as you like. Now, can you change into whatever I say?"

"Don't make me laugh," replied the witch with great confidence. "I can change myself into any form. Go ahead and say anything you like."

The priest saw how arrogant the witch was and said, "Can you make yourself as tall as the ceiling?" No sooner had he said this than the witch grew to the height of the ceiling with no trouble at all. "Mmm. But I bet you can't make yourself as tall as that mountain over there," continued the priest.

"Piece of cake," replied the witch and made herself as big as the mountain.

The priest appeared to be impressed. "That's really something. You can make yourself bigger, but you can't make yourself as small as a bean, can you?" he said.

The witch became piqued. "That's easy. Just watch." Now she shrank to a size no bigger than the end of the priest's finger.

"Very impressive! So now it's my turn," said the priest. He then suddenly picked up the bean-sized witch and stuffed her in the rice cake he had been toasting and gulped it down in one mouthful.

From then on, the witch was never seen again in the mountains, and the mischievous young apprentice became a very good boy, listening attentively to everything the priest said.



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JAPANESE FOLKTALE: SANNEN NETARO – THE BOY WHO SLEPT FOR THREE YEARS

Long, long ago, there lived an old man, an old woman, and their son. Now the son was of an age where he should be out working in the rice fields, but he did nothing but sleep from morning to night. He lay around the house like this for three years. People started calling him Netaro, the "Sleeping Boy."

His old mother was worried. "Get up!" she told him. "Go out and help in the fields! If you don't do any work, you'll never find anyone willing to marry you."

But a sleepy "mmm" was all that Netaro said.

The old man was angry with Netaro. He shouted at his son: "This is no time to sleep! We've had no rain this season, and the fields are looking terrible. Go fetch some water from the river and water the fields. If you don't help out a little, we'll have no rice to eat!"

Once again, though, "mmm" was all Netaro had to say.

One day, though, Netaro suddenly got out of bed. "I'm going up to the mountains," he told his parents. "I'll be back."

Later that day he came home with a large eagle. No one could imagine where or how he had caught the bird. "Don't let him escape," Netaro warned. He put the eagle in a cage.

"Now I'm going into town," he told his parents. "I'll be back."

He returned that evening with a lantern he had bought in town. "Hey, Netaro, what have you been up to?" his parents asked him.

But sure enough, Netaro only said one thing: "Mmm." He went right to sleep.

Now the house next to Netaro's belonged to a wealthy family. They had endless fields and rice paddies, and a huge storehouse filled to the brim with two or three years' worth of rice.

One night, as everyone else lay sleeping, Netaro woke up, got out of bed, and sneaked into the yard of the house next door. With him he had his eagle and the unlit lantern. Carrying them carefully, Netaro climbed the big pine tree growing in the yard. When he reached the top, he called out to the rich man: "Hey! Come out at once!"

The rich man was awakened by Netaro's shouts.

"I'm a tengu!" Netaro called out from the treetop. "I live deep in the mountains!"

A tengu is a long-nosed Japanese goblin. Nobody wants to get on a tengu's bad side. To avoid offending the tengu, the startled rich man quickly went outside. "A tengu?!" he said to himself. "Oh my!"



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"Good evening, Mr. Tengu," the rich man said, crouching and bowing before the darkened tree.
"What can I do for you?"

"I want you to give your only daughter's hand in marriage to Netaro, the young man next door."

"What?!" the rich man said in surprise. "Why would you want me to do that?"

"Don't ask why. Just hand her over by tomorrow."

"I know you're a powerful tengu," the rich man cried, "but I can't give my only daughter away just like that."

"Oh, I see," Netaro said. "You can't give your daughter to a lazy fellow like Netaro. All right. If that's the case, someday your family is going to become just as poor as his."

"Oh no!" said the rich man. "What'll I do? Let me think . . . Well . . . All right! Have it your way. I'll give up my daughter."

It was then that Netaro lit his lantern. He fastened the lantern to the eagle's talons and sent the eagle flying. Flapping its big wings, the eagle headed for the mountains. The rich man wept with fear, thinking the flying eagle with the lantern attached to its feet was a real tengu.

The next morning, the rich man's daughter showed up at Netaro's house to marry him. From that day onward, Netaro was a different man. He never again lay around the house, but worked as hard as he could.

First he started digging a ditch to bring water from the faraway river to the village. His bride helped him. Although the rich man's daughter had never worked in her life, she picked up a hoe and started digging. Finally, some years later, water flowed from the river into the village. The villagers never again had to worry about getting enough water for their fields.

The rich man was delighted, and gave all his rice paddies and fields to Netaro. He went around the village with a smile on his face, proudly telling anyone who cared to listen that Netaro was the reincarnation of a tengu.

WEBSITE ORIGIN: <http://japanfolklore.blogspot.co.nz/2008/08/sannen-netaro-young-man-who-slept-for.html>

JAPANESE FOLKTALE – TSURU NO ONGAESHI - FAIRY CRANE

Long, long ago in a far off land there lived a young man. One day, while working on his farm, a brilliant white crane came swooping down and crashed to the ground at his feet. The man noticed an arrow pierced through one of its wings. Taking pity on the crane, he pulled out the arrow and cleaned the wound. Thanks to his care the bird was soon able to fly again. The young man sent the crane back to the sky, saying, "Be careful to avoid hunters." The crane circled three times over his head, let out a cry as if in thanks, and then flew away.

As the day grew dark the young man made his way home. When he arrived, he was surprised by the sight of a beautiful woman whom he had never seen before standing at the doorway. "Welcome home. I am your wife," said the woman. The young man was surprised and said, "I am very poor, and cannot support you." The woman answered, pointing to a small sack, "Don't worry, I have plenty of rice," and began preparing dinner. The young man was puzzled, but the two began a happy life together. And the rice sack, mysteriously, remained full always.

One day the wife asked the young man to build her a weaving room. When it was completed, she said, "You must promise never to peek inside." With that, she shut herself up in the room. The young man waited patiently for her to come out. Finally, after seven days, the sound of the loom stopped and his wife, who had become very thin, stepped out of the room holding the most beautiful cloth he had ever seen. "Take this cloth to the marketplace and it will sell for a high price," said the wife. The next day the young man brought it to town and, just as she said, it sold for many coins. Happy, he returned home.

The wife then returned to the room and resumed weaving. Curiosity began to overtake the man, who wondered, "How can she weave such beautiful cloth with no thread?" Soon he could stand it no longer and, desperate to know his wife's secret, peeked into the room. To his great shock, his wife was gone. Instead, a crane sat intently at the loom weaving a cloth, plucking out its own feathers for thread.



The bird then noticed the young man peeking in and said, "I am the crane that you saved. I wanted to repay you so I became your wife, but now that you have seen my true form I can stay here no longer." Then, handing the man the finished cloth, it said, "I leave you this to remember me by." The crane then abruptly flew off into the sky and disappeared forever.

WEBSITE ORIGIN: <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/folk/tsuru/index.html>

JAPANESE FOLKTALE: URI HIME – MELON PRINCESS

Long, long ago there lived an old man and his old wife in a village. One day he went to a mountain to gather woods, while she went to a river to wash clothes. When she was washing in the river, she found a big melon flowing down to her. She caught and took it with her to the house. Soon he came home from the mountain



"Husband, I found this big melon in the river today, so let's eat together." said she, trying to cut it with a kitchen knife, when it split of itself and a pretty baby came out of it. As they had no children, they were very happy. They named her 'Melon' because she was born from a melon.

Soon the baby grew up to be a pretty girl, then a beautiful lady. She was so clever and especially good at making textiles. The rumour of her went to the town, lastly to the lord of the country. The lord sent his men to the house. The old man and his wife were so glad to hear that their daughter would marry the lord.

On the day before her marriage her parents went shopping in the town.

"Dear Melon, we'll go shopping in the town to buy your trousseaus. You must be in the house and must not open the door and windows even if someone calls you. Be careful in case a mountain monster comes to you."



She was making textiles alone at home. A mountain monster had been watching them leaving the house and now visited her.

"Miss. Melon. Are you in? I'm your grandmother. Please open the door." said the monster.

"I'm here, but my parents told me never to open the door if somebody came. So I can't open the door."

"If so, why don't you open it for my finger to enter?" She opened a little.

"Miss. Melon. Why don't you open for my hand to enter?" She opened a little more.

"Miss. Melon. Why don't you open for my leg to enter?" She opened a little more.

"Miss. Melon. Why don't you open for my head to enter?"

"No. I will be scolded by my parents" she answered.

"But, Miss. Melon. I would like to see your face. Why don't you open?"

"So, I'll open for only your head to enter."

On putting her head through the door, the monster rushed into the house. The monster changed her dirty clothes with Melon's beautiful Kimono and transformed herself into 'Melon'. The Monster then took Melon to mountain and tied her to a plum tree.



On the next day, the lord's men were carrying the monster in a palanquin to their Lord's castle. On their way to the castle, when they came near the pear tree to which she was tied, the crows in the mountain began to have a strange cry.

"She is not Melon. Melon is in the mountain. She is not Melon. Melon is in the mountain. CAW-CAW"



They thought there was something strange with 'Melon' and found the real Melon tied to the tree. The mountain monster was caught and killed on the spot.

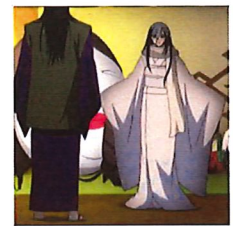
The beautiful lady got married to the lord and she was called 'Melon Princess.'

JAPANESE FOLKTALE: YUKI ONNA - SNOW WOMAN

むかしむかし (mukashi mukashi, or "Once upon a time"), there was a handsome young man named Minokichi, travelling with his master in the middle of a snowstorm. The snow was falling so hard, and they were really exhausted, so they decided to take shelter in an old, abandoned hut.

That evening, while they were sleeping, a draft of cold wind swept into the hut. This woke Minokichi up, and he was surprised to see a beautiful young lady with long black hair, skin as white as the snow, and a white, flowing kimono, hovering over his unconscious master. Her beautiful face was an inch away from his master's face, and it seems like she was blowing an icy breath onto his mouth.

She then proceeded to approach Minokichi. She floated towards him with a terrifying and deadly cold expression on her face, but when she got close enough to see the young man's handsome face, she stopped and her facial expression somewhat softened. She stared at him, and after a few moments, she spoke, "I shall spare you, but you must promise me that you will never speak of this incident ever again, or you shall end up like him".



A confused Minokichi nervously answered, "Yes, yes, I promise!"

This was the last thing he remembered that night, for afterwards, he fell unconscious. The next day, he was terrified to find his master dead and cold. Minokichi then went to a nearby town to continue his life, trying hard to forget that fateful night.

Years later, he met an extremely beautiful young lady, whose name was Oyuki. They became friends, then lovers, until they decided to get married.

Minokichi treasured Oyuki with all of his heart, loving her more than anything else in the world, and together they produced a wonderful family with beautiful and intelligent children.

Oyuki stayed young-looking and beautiful through the years. One night, while their children were sleeping, Minokichi took notice of this while looking at her face and told her,

"My beautiful Oyuki, you remind me of an incident that happened to me long ago. I was travelling with my master when we were attacked by a beautiful but deadly spirit of a lady with an icy breath one night, killing my master. She was very terrifying, but your face resembles her supernatural beauty."



Upon hearing this, Oyuki stood up and floated in the air, her eyes welling with tears and anger. "That woman was me! You broke your promise! But I cannot kill you because of our children! I cannot be with you anymore. Take good care of our children."

With this, Oyuki, the Yuki-onna (or snow woman) vanished and was never seen again.