

THE MAGIC BROCADE

A folktale from China

Long ago a widow lived with her three sons in a small village in southern China. They survived on the money she made from weaving. The widow was well known for her brocades which were made by weaving silver, gold and silk designs into rich fabric. She was especially talented at making flowers, animals and birds appear beautiful and lifelike.

One day the widow went to the market to sell her wares. Her brocades sold quickly so she took time to see what the other vendors were selling. In one stall she saw a magnificent picture of a pretty white house nestled in rolling hills and surrounded by a lovely garden full of beautiful flowers. She loved it so much that she bought it.

When she got home, the widow showed the picture to her three sons. She said she wished she could live in a place like the one found in it. Although her two older sons liked the picture they were a bit upset that

she spent her money on it instead of food. The youngest encouraged her to sew the design into her next brocade, and she did.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, the widow worked as if possessed. Her two oldest sons complained that she wasn't making anything to sell. They had to chop wood to help the family survive; they did not like that. Finally, the youngest son said that he would take care of the family. Every day, he went up into the mountains to chop enough wood so the entire family could eat.

At the end of the third year, the woman finished her brocade. It was more beautiful than anything she had ever made. She was so proud and happy. Then, all of a sudden a strong wind swept through the house and took her brocade away. It flew out of the house and over the hill, further and further away until it had completely vanished.

The woman was so surprised and heartbroken that she fainted. When she finally awoke, she asked her oldest son if he would try to find her brocade. He agreed, and set out immediately. After traveling more than a month he came across an old woman who was sitting in front of a stone house. She asked him where he was going and he told her the

story of his mother's lost brocade. The woman knew that it was carried away by fairies who liked it so much they wanted to make a copy of it for themselves. She also told him that the only way to retrieve it was this:

1. Knock out his two front teeth and put them into the mouth of the stone horse
2. Let the stone horse eat ten pieces of fruit from a special tree
3. Mount the horse who would take him through the flames of Fire Mountain then across the icy sea.
4. While traveling through these dangerous places he could not utter a single word of complaint or he would be lost forever.

The old woman knew that the young man did not want to make this journey so she gave him a box of gold and told him to go home. As he traveled back the way he came, he decided he did not want to share the gold. So, instead of going home, he went off to live on his own.

When her oldest son did not return after two months' time, the widow asked her second son to try and find her lost brocade. He agreed, and set off to do so. After traveling about a month, the young man came upon the old woman sitting in front of her stone house. She told him

the same thing she shared with his older brother. The second son became frightened. The woman gave him a box of gold and told him to go home. As he traveled back the way he came, he decided he did not want to share the gold. So, instead of going home, he went off to live on his own.

After waiting another two months for her second son to return, the youngest son begged his mother to let him go look for the brocade. Eventually she agreed. The young man traveled about a month when he saw the old woman sitting in front of her stone house. She told him the same thing she shared with his brothers.

Unlike his brothers, the youngest son would not turn back. He immediately knocked out his two front teeth and put them in the mouth of the stone horse. The stone horse came alive and meandered over to the special tree where he ate ten pieces of its fruit. The young man then mounted the horse, which headed off to the land of the fairies. After three days they came to Flame Mountain. For as far as the boy could see, fires burst forth out of the ground. He spurred the horse forward, through the flames and not once did he utter a word of complaint.

On the other side of Flame Mountain they came upon the icy sea. The boy spurred the horse on into the cold, cold water. He endured it without a word of complaint. After crossing the icy sea, they came upon the land of the fairies, whose occupants were very surprised to see him. He kindly asked for the return of his mother's brocade. They said they were almost done copying it. While he waited, the fairies fed him and let him rest.

One fairy loved his mother's brocade so much she wanted to become part of it. She sewed herself into his mother's original work. She was wearing red. When the boy awoke, the fairies were gone but his mother's brocade was next to him. He took it and headed home. When the horse got him back to the old woman's stone house she took the boy's teeth from the horse and returned them to the boy. She also gave him a pair of deerskin shoes that enabled him to get back to his mother immediately.

The widow was so happy to have her brocade back. She took it outside to get a good look at it. As she unrolled it, the picture came to life. The widow and her son now had a new home to live in. In addition to the house, hills and beautiful garden, a woman in red also appeared. It was the fairy who sewed herself into the brocade. She

and the widow's youngest son got married and lived happily ever after.

The widow's two oldest boys squandered their gold and became beggars and thieves. One day they came upon a lovely white house on rolling hills with a beautiful garden and thought they would rob it. When they realized that it belonged to their mother, they turned away in shame, never to be seen in that part of the country again.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the tale "The Magic Brocade" found in the following sources.

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The Young Oxford Book of Folk Tales, edited by Kevin Crossley-Holland, Oxford: Oxford University Press, c1998, pp 7-14.

Wonder Tales From Around the World, by Heather Forest, Illustrations by David Boston, Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., c1995, pp11-16.

