

The monkey loaded everything on his back. It was very, very heavy, but since his bride had requested it, he did not want to refuse, and they set off up the mountain, the monkey carrying his heavy load.

It was just the beginning of April, and on both sides of the road the cherry trees were in full bloom. They traveled along until they came to a place where the road went close to the edge of a deep canyon. At the bottom of the canyon there was a river. At this point the branches of the cherry trees fell over into the canyon, making such a beautiful scene that the girl stopped, saying to the monkey, "Oh, such a lovely cherry tree. Won't you please climb up and get me a branch of those cherry blossoms?"

Since this too was a request of his bride, the monkey agreed and began to climb up into one of the trees. "Please get some flowers from the topmost branch," the girl cried from below, so the monkey continued to climb higher and higher.

"Isn't this about right?" he asked, but the girl urged him higher and higher until he had climbed up to where the branches were very small and weak. The load on his back was very heavy, and the branch he was on was very small; suddenly it broke, and the monkey fell headlong into the canyon below, landing with a splash, drossun, in the river. As he sank from sight with the heavy mortar on his back, he sang this song:

I do not regret my death,
But oh, how sad for my poor bride.

And he soon disappeared from view.

The girl was very happy and returned to her home. *Naa, mosu mosu, komen dango*. "Well, halla, halla, rice cakes."

Kathleen Ragan's commentary:

Loss of face is particularly important in Japan. The youngest daughter who saves her father's honor by agreeing to marry the monkey is comparable to Beauty in "Beauty and the Beast" who saves her father's life by agreeing to marry a beast. The concept of "giri" strictly governs every give-and-take in Japanese society; gifts and reciprocal gifts are kept track of meticulously. Both the monkey and the father know that the monkey's offer of help has strings attached. When the monkey accepts the daughter, he breaks two rules. He accepts more than he can ever repay and he has presumed to transgress the strong hierarchical divisions of Japanese society. The monkey's willingness to pick the cherry blossoms further reveals his improper behavior because as the old proverb says, "Only a fool plucks the cherry blossom." The youngest daughter saves herself from this improper marriage by setting up a situation in which the monkey suffers the consequences of his pretensions. Pride goeth before a fall.

In many folktales the father gives away his daughter to a monster. This "Beauty and the Beast" type of tale can represent arranged marriages where young girls were given to older, physically unattractive, but rich men. Beauty is given to the Beast, the youngest daughter in "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" is given to a bear. The women submit to the authority of their fathers and are convinced to sacrifice themselves for the good of the father and/or the family. Although we have been influenced to sympathize with and think romantically of the Beast it is important to remember that these women are being asked to give their spiritual love and physical love, to a beast, a bear, a monkey, with absolutely no guarantee that it will magically turn into a wonderful man in the end!

• from Kathleen Ragan's *Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from Around the World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998)

The Monkey Bridegroom

Japanese Tale

In a certain place there lived an old man. One day he went out to dig up gobo roots,* but he couldn't dig out a single one. Just as he was wondering what to do, a monkey came along and called out, "Grandfather, grandfather, shall I help you pull up gobo roots?"

"Yes, please help me. If you will dig up some roots for me; I'll give you one of my daughters as your wife."

"Will you really do that!" the monkey cried. "Then I shall come to claim her in three days."

The old man, thinking that the monkey surely would never come to claim one of his daughters, agreed to all he said. While they were talking, the monkey began pulling up gobo roots and soon had a large pile of them. "The monkey certainly has pulled up a lot of roots; perhaps he really intends to come for one of my daughters!" the old man thought to himself, beginning to get a little worried.

Finally the monkey had pulled up every gobo root in the field. "Well," he said to the old man, "I shall surely come for your daughter." Then he scampered off.

The old man thought to himself: "He must really intend to come. Why did I ever tell him that I'd give him one of my daughters? What shall I do? What shall I do? I don't think that any of my girls will agree to become his wife. I must try to persuade one of them." The old man walked sadly home, talking to himself.

When he got home, he called his eldest daughter and, after telling her what had happened, said, "When the monkey comes in three days, will you go to be his bride?"

"What!" she cried. "Who would ever want to become a monkey's wife!" and she refused even to consider it.

The old man then called his second daughter and asked her the same thing.

"Why," she cried, "what a fool you are! Who would ever make a promise like that? I may be older than our youngest sister, but I'm not going to become that monkey's bride. I don't think anyone would do it," and so she refused completely.

"Since the other two have refused," the old man thought to himself, "I don't think that the youngest will agree either. However, I'll have to ask her; there's nothing else to do."

He went to his youngest daughter and told her what he had promised and that the monkey would be coming in three days to get his bride. "Your sisters have both refused. Will you please go and be his bride?" His face paling, the old man made his request.

The girl thought for a while, then replied, "Yes, father, since you have promised, I will go."

Upon hearing this, the old man was overjoyed, crying, "Really! Will you really go?"

"I will go because of my duty to you;," said the girl, "but you must give me three things to take with me."

"What things do you want?" he asked. "I will give you anything you request."

"Please give me a very heavy mortar, together with a heavy maul for pounding rice and one ta of rice."

"What!" he cried, "is that all you want! If so, you shall have them!" and he soon brought them to her.

On the third day the monkey came as he had promised. The youngest daughter said to him: "I am to become your bride, but when we go back to the mountains, we will want to eat rice mochi, so let's take this mortar, maul, and bag of rice with us. You can carry it all on your back."