

The Island of the Sun
A Chinese Story
By David Heathfiled

There was once a farmer who had two sons. The older son was selfish and greedy, while the younger son was kind and generous.

When the farmer died, the older brother took all of his land for himself leaving the younger brother with nothing except a basket and a sharp knife with which he could cut firewood.

He would go into the forest and chop wood and sell it in exchange for a little rice in the marketplace.

He was poor. He had nothing.

One day, the young brother climbed through the forest to the top of the mountain, and there he sat upon a rock gazing out towards the west where the sun was setting. And as he sat there all alone he felt a rush of air from above and he looked and there was a bright bird flying down towards him, a huge wingspan. He felt the beating of air, the rush of air. And then it landed next to him:

‘Why do you sit here all alone?’

‘I am poor. I have nothing.’

‘Is this true or is this false?’

‘It is true, I am poor. I have nothing.’

‘Then climb on my back,’ said the mighty bird, ‘and I will carry you to the Island of the Sun. There you may take one piece of gold before I bring you back.’

He climbed onto the back of the bird and the bird took off...

Away from the mountain the great bird flew.

Over the forest the great bird flew.

Over the waters the great bird flew.

To the Island of the Sun the great bird flew.

And as the bird landed, the sun set behind the island which glittered brightly, and the boy took one piece of gold. He put it in his basket and climbed onto the back of the great bird.

Away from the island the great bird flew.

Over the waters the great bird flew.

Over the forest the great bird flew.

Back to the mountain the great bird flew.

The young brother took that piece of gold and went down out of the forest. And there he bought a small piece of land. And there he reared pigs, cows, and a few hens.

He lived well. He worked hard.

But one day his older brother came.

'Where did you find this wealth, this land?'

And the young brother told him.

'I want this. Give me that old basket and your knife.'

And the older brother set off up through the forest. And when he came to that mountain he sat upon a rock and waited.

After a while he felt a rush of air and a beating of wings was heard. And there, as he gazed towards the west, towards the setting sun, a bird appeared from its bright rays, beating its wings, coming closer. It landed next to him:

'Why do you sit here all alone?'

'I am poor. I have nothing.'

'Is this true or is this false?'

'It is true, I am poor. I have nothing. I want gold!'

'Climb on my back,' said the great bird. 'I will take you to the Island of the Sun. There you may take one piece of gold.'

Away from the mountain the great bird flew.

Over the forest the great bird flew.

Over the waters the great bird flew.

To the Island of the Sun the great bird flew.

And as it landed, the sun set behind the island. The older brother looked and saw sparkling gold everywhere. He picked up one piece and placed it in the basket.

'The basket seems empty. I may as well take another.'

A second piece he placed in the basket, then a third. He continued picking up the largest chunks of gold until the basket was completely full.

Then he turned. And as he turned he saw that the bird had flown away and the sun was rising. He stood there and was burned to a crisp.

The young brother inherited his older brother's land. He tended the land well and with love. And what he produced he shared with others of the community.