

# *Hana-Saka-Jiji*

Green Willow And Other Japanese Fairy Tales

Japanese

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*Easy*  
*7 min read*

In the early days there lived a good old couple. All their lives long they had been honest and hard-working, but they had always been poor. Now in their old age it was all they could do to make both ends meet, the poor old creatures.

But they did not complain, not a bit of it. They were merry as the day is long. If they ever went to bed cold or hungry they said nothing about it, and if they had bite or sup in the house you may be sure they shared it with their dog, for they were very fond of him. He was faithful, good, and clever. One evening the old man and the old woman went out to do a bit of digging in their garden, and the dog went with them.

While they were working the dog was sniffing the ground, and presently he began to scratch up the earth with his paws.

“What can the dog be about now?” says the old woman.

“Oh, just nothing at all,” says the old man; “he’s playing.”

“It’s more than playing,” says the old woman. “It’s my belief he’s found something worth having.”

So off she went to see what the dog would be at, and the old man followed her and leaned on his spade. Sure enough the dog had dug a pretty big hole by this time, and he went on scratching with his paws for dear life and barking short and sharp. The old man helped with his spade, and before long they came on a big box of

hidden treasure, silver and gold and jewels and rich stuffs.

It is easy to believe that the good old couple were glad. They patted their clever dog, and he jumped up and licked their faces. After this they carried the treasure into the house. The dog ran to and fro and barked.

Now, next door to the good old couple lived another old couple, not so good as they, but envious and discontented. When the dog found the hidden treasure they looked through a hole in the bamboo hedge and saw the whole affair. Do you think they were pleased? Why, not a bit of it. They were so angry and envious that they could get no pleasure by day nor rest at night.

At last the bad old man came to the good old man.

“I’ve come to ask for the loan of your dog,” he says.

“With all my heart,” says the good old man; “take him and welcome.”

So the bad old man took the dog and brought him to their best room. And the bad old man and his wife put a supper, of all manner of fine things to eat, before the dog, and bade him fall to.

“Honourable Dog,” they said, “you are good and wise, eat and afterwards find us treasure.”

But the dog would not eat.

“All the more left for us,” said the greedy old couple, and they ate up the dog’s supper in a twinkling. Then they tied a string round his neck and dragged him into the garden to find treasure. But never a morsel of treasure did he find, nor a glint of gold, nor a shred of rich stuff.

“The devil’s in the beast,” cries the bad old man, and he beat the dog with a big stick. Then the dog began to scratch up the earth with his paws.

“Oho! Oho!” says the bad old man to his wife, “now for the treasure.”

But was it treasure that the dog dug up? Not a bit of it. It was a heap of loathly rubbish, too bad to tell of. But they say it smelt most vilely and the bad old couple were fain to run away, hiding their noses with their sleeves.

“Arah, arah!” they cried, “the dog has deceived us.” And that very night they killed the poor dog and buried him at the foot of a tall pine tree.

Alack for the good old man and the good old woman when they heard the dog was gone! It was they that wept the bitter tears. They pulled flowers and strewed them on the poor dog’s grave. They burned incense and they spread out good things to eat, and the vapour that rose from them comforted the poor dog’s spirit.

Then the good old man cut down the pine tree, and made a mortar of its wood. He put rice in the mortar and pounded the rice with a pestle.

“Wonder of wonders,” cried the old woman, who was looking on, “wonder of wonders, good man, our rice is all turned into broad gold pieces!”

So it was sure enough.

Presently, in comes the bad old man to ask for the loan of the mortar.

“For I’m needing a mortar something very special,” says he.

“Take it,” says the good old man; “I’m sure you’re welcome.”

So the bad old man took away the mortar under his arm, and when he had got it home he filled it with rice in a twinkling. And he pounded away at it for dear life’s sake.

“Do you see any gold coming?” he says to his wife, who was looking on.

“Never a bit,” she says, “but the rice looks queer.”

Queer enough it was, mildewed and rotten, no use to man or beast.

“Arah, arah!” they cried, “the mortar has deceived us.” And they didn’t let the grass grow under their feet, but lit a fire and burnt the mortar.

Now the good old couple had lost their fairy mortar. But they never said a word, the patient old folk. The good old man took some of the ashes of the mortar and went his way.

Now it was mid-winter time, and all the trees were bare. There was not a flower to be seen, nor yet a little green

leaf.

What does the good old man do but climb into a cherry tree and scatter a handful of his ashes over the branches? In a moment the tree was covered with blossoms.

“It will do,” says the good old man, and down he gets from the tree and off he sets for the Prince’s palace, where he knocks at the gate as bold as brass.

“Who are you?” they ask him.

“I am Hana-saka-jiji,” says the old man, “the man who makes dead trees to blossom; my business is with the Prince.”

Mighty pleased the Prince was when he saw his cherry trees and his peach trees and his plum trees rush into blossom.

“Why,” he said, “it is mid-winter, and we have the joys of spring.” And he called forth his lady wife and her maidens and all his own retainers to see the work of Hana-saka-jiji. At last he sent the old man home with a passing rich reward.

Now what of the bad old couple? Were they content to let well alone? Oh no.

They gathered together all the ashes that were left, and when they had put them in a basket they went about the town crying:

“We are the Hana-saka-jiji. We can make dead trees blossom.”

Presently out comes the Prince and all his company to see the show. And the bad old man climbs up into a tree forthwith and scatters his ashes.

But the tree never blossomed, never a bit. The ashes flew into the Prince’s eyes, and the Prince flew into a rage. There was a pretty to-do. The bad old couple were caught and well beaten. Sad and sorry they crept home at night. It is to be hoped that they mended their ways. Howbeit the good people, their neighbours, grew rich and lived happy all their days.

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