



The Voice of the Flute

THREE brothers lived alone with their only sister in a little hut at the edge of the forest. Their parents had died many years ago and the children were left to survive as best they could.

Every day the brothers went into the forest to collect firewood. The boys would then tie the firewood into bundles, place the bundles on their heads and walk to the distant villages. There they would offer their firewood to the village people in exchange for food and the other things they needed. The sister always stayed at home. She cooked, cleaned and took care of the house while the brothers were out.

While the sister treated her three brothers very well, it was clear that the youngest was her favourite. She always paid special attention to him. The other two brothers did not like this. They felt

that they deserved more attention since they were the ones who did most of the work in the forest.

"Why do you always treat him better than you treat us?" they often complained to their sister, not even bothering to hide their jealousy of the smallest brother.

"I have three brothers and I love you all," the sister would reply. She would never say more than this for she did not trust her two elder brothers and she was afraid that they might harm her in some way. So she continued to try and please the two elder brothers in every possible way while still having



a special affection for the youngest.

One day, the two elder brothers sent the youngest to collect some firewood while they remained at home with their sister. When the youngest brother returned home, his sister was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is sister?" he asked, wondering where she was.

The two brothers were eating and seemed to be enjoying their meal very much. They merely glanced at him to tell him that their sister had gone to collect some berries.

After they had finished eating, the two brothers went to bed. The youngest brother then decided to go in search of his sister. For several hours he wandered through the forest looking for her and calling her name out loud. He could not find her anywhere. As he was returning home, he noticed some footprints at the back of their house. He followed the footprints and found that they led to a pond not far off. The pond was too deep for him to enter. He returned home convinced that he would never see his sister again.

He cried and cried through the entire night. The next morning when his two brothers awoke they saw

how grieved he was. They tried to console him by telling him that their sister would soon return.

"That's not true," he sobbed, "I know she will never come back to us."

"There is no cause to worry," they said. "There are so many different kinds of fruits in the forest we are certain that she will not die of hunger. We know that she is all right," they continued.

But try as they might, the elder brothers could not convince the youngest brother that their sister was alive and well. The youngest brother was so unhappy that he could neither eat nor sleep. All he could think about was his lost sister.

Some time later, he noticed that a bamboo shoot was springing up at the edge of the pond where he had seen the footprints. The plant attracted his attention because of its luxuriant, green appearance. He began to take care of the plant. In a short time, a very healthy, stout clump of bamboo swayed and rustled in the breeze beside the pond. The tall, overhanging bamboos gave a lovely shade and the smallest brother often came and rested beneath them as they bowed this way and that in the wind. It was at times like these that he thought most of his lost

sister and longed for her return.

One day, while he was there he cut one of the shoots of the bamboo and made it into a flute. When he placed the flute to his lips and blew it, he heard a strange and beautiful tune that he had never heard before. He was very surprised at what he heard. He felt as if he were in a strange dream. Every time he blew the flute, he would hear the same song:

*“Blow flute, blow,
Blow flute, blow,
My smallest brother is good and kind,
My smallest brother is good and kind.”*



It seemed to him that the flute had a voice of its own which came alive every time he blew it. And he was sure that this voice coming from the flute was the voice of his sister. "She's alive! She's alive!" he said, unable to hold back the tears. Bursting with joy, he cherished this thought secretly in his heart. And he blew and blew the flute until he was too tired to blow it any more. That night was the first night he slept so well in a long, long time.

One evening, while he was blowing his flute, his two brothers came up to him. "Why are you always blowing this flute?" they asked him.

"I like the music it makes," he answered.

"Let us have a try," they demanded.

He handed his brothers the flute and they both took turns blowing it. But the brothers were in for a terrible shock. Each time they blew, the voice of the flute floated in the air for all to hear:

*"Blow flute, blow,
Blow flute, blow,
My elder brothers are my deadly foes,
My elder brothers are my deadly foes."*

With their mouths wide open, they stared at

each other. Their faces became pale and drawn as if they had seen something which filled their hearts with terror. Their hands and knees trembled with fright and the flute fell to the ground. Like madmen, they ran screaming through the forest never to show their faces again.

The smallest brother took up the flute. He dusted it and held it to his breast as he turned and walked quietly home. Soon he was fast asleep, the flute beneath his pillow. And from that day on, the flute was his closest friend.

