

The bamboo cutter

(Traditional Japanese folktale)

Once upon a time, in a small village in Japan surrounded by towering bamboo forests, there lived an old bamboo cutter and his wife. They were kind and humble people who led a simple life, yet they had always longed to have a child. Every morning, the old man would take his tools and head into the forest to cut bamboo, which he would then craft into baskets and other items to sell at the market.

One day, while walking through the forest in search of the finest bamboo, he noticed a stalk glowing with a golden light, as if it were magical. Astonished, he approached with care and gently cut it open. He was left speechless by what he found inside: a tiny girl—no bigger than a thumb—radiating a soft, gentle light of her own.

“It is a gift from the gods!” the old man exclaimed, overcome with emotion.

He brought the girl home, and he and his wife decided to raise her as their own daughter. They named her Kaguya, which means “shining light.” From that day on, the couple’s lives changed completely. Kaguya was not only special for her beauty and kindness, but she also

seemed to bring good fortune: every time the old man cut a stalk of bamboo, he would find gold inside. Before long, the family became wealthy and was able to live in comfort.

Kaguya grew rapidly, and within a few months, she had blossomed into a young woman of extraordinary beauty. Everyone in the village spoke of her, and many nobles began traveling from far away just to see her. Yet, despite her beauty and her new, comfortable life, Kaguya always seemed to harbor a hidden sadness. She would spend long periods gazing at the moon, as if she were speaking to it.

Her parents often asked what was troubling her, but she would always reply with a smile:
“Do not worry about me. Everything is fine.”

In time, five prominent nobles arrived in the village to ask for Kaguya’s hand in marriage. Each was convinced he could win her heart by offering her riches and promises of happiness. But Kaguya had no desire to marry anyone, so she decided to put them to the test.

“If you wish to win my heart, you must bring me a very special gift,” she told them—”something that no one else could possibly obtain.”

From the first, she requested a tree branch with leaves made of pure gold. From the second, the sacred bowl used by the gods in the mountains. From the third, a magical pearl taken from a dragon’s neck. And so it went, as she assigned an impossible task to each of her suitors.

One by one, they failed. Some tried to deceive her with fakes, but Kaguya—clever and sharp-witted—always uncovered the truth. In the end, she rejected them all and continued her quiet life with her

parents.

Yet, her parents noticed that she was becoming increasingly melancholy, especially during nights when the moon was full. One night, Kaguya finally decided to share her secret with them.

“Father, Mother, there is something you must know. I am not from this world. I came from the moon, and the gods sent me here for a time. But soon, I must return.”

Her parents were left speechless. They did not want to lose her, yet they knew there was nothing they could do to change her destiny.

When the day arrived, the sky filled with a brilliant light. A golden chariot descended from the moon, guided by celestial beings who had come for Kaguya. The entire village gathered to bid her farewell. Her parents wept inconsolably, but Kaguya embraced them with love.

“I will always remember you,” she said, tears in her eyes. “You have been the best parents I could have ever wished for.”

With heavy hearts, they watched as Kaguya stepped into the chariot of light and ascended toward the sky. As the chariot vanished among the stars, a profound sadness washed over the village. Yet that night, the sky glowed with a special light—as if Kaguya, from the moon, were sending her love and gratitude to those who had cherished her so dearly.

Questions for discussion with children

How do you think the bamboo cutter and his wife felt when they found little Kaguya inside the bamboo? What would you have done if you had found her?

Why do you think Kaguya did not want to marry any of her suitors, even though they offered her extraordinary things? What is more important to you: gifts or sincerity?

Kaguya had to leave because it was her destiny to return to the moon. How do you think her adoptive parents felt when they said goodbye? How would you feel if you had to say goodbye to someone you love?

Why do you think Kaguya sent her love from the moon, making the nights brighter? What does this teach us about love and memories?

If you could travel to the moon like Kaguya, what would you like to see or do there? And what would you miss about Earth?