Poisonous Food

Long, long ago there lived a young wife and her mother-in-law in a house who were on bad terms and always had quarrels with each other.

However hard she cleaned the house, her mother found the dirty places out and scolded her. However hard she cooked every meal, her mother told her that it tasted so bad that she couldn't eat it. What is worse, she was spoken ill of by her mother in the neighborhood.



On the other hand, the wife also hated her mother so badly that even if she was called by her, she pretended not to hear her. She always gave her mother a sulky look.

When at last she didn't feel like seeing her mother any more, she went to a Buddhist priest at a temple to get some advice.

"I see. I'll give you this poisonous powder." he said, handing it to her. "You have only to mix it a little into rice when you serve meals to her. Your mother will be getting weaker and weaker until she is ill and dies. But you must be more careful and much kinder to her for your mother not to notice it. Listen to her and be kind to her."

She started to mix the poisonous powder into her rice.

She was told by her mother as usual that it tasted too bad to eat. Whenever she was scolded by her, she apologized to her mother touching her hands on the Tatami-mat.

"I'm sorry, I'll try my best to cook better. So please forgive me."

Whenever she was scolded by her mother after cleaning the house, she apologized to her touching her hands on the floor.

"I'm sorry, I'll clean it again. So please forgive me."

As she continued to mix the poison into her rice as she was told by the priest, she thought her mother would be ill sooner or later. But it was strange that she was getting better and better day by day.

What surprised her most was, whenever her mother met her neighbors, she began to speak like this:

"My daughter-in-law is wonderful. She works very hard and she cooks very well. Her dishes are so delicious. She is the best in the country. I'm proud of her."

Her mother began to clean the house together with her daughter, who didn't make out what had made her so different.

But she was so happy whenever she was praised by her. Without knowing it, she had always smile on her face. She had stopped mixing poison into her rice.

One day her mother-in-law suddenly became ill in bed. She thought the poison worked on her. Taking care of her mother, the wife found her eyes full of tears.

Looking at the tear, her mother said to her,

"Don't worry. I'll get better soon. When I become well, I want to work with you again. I do like you, a kind daughter."

She couldn't sit there any longer and rushed to the Buddhist priest at the temple.

"Mr. Priest. I was wrong. My mother is very kind and gentle to me. But I gave her poison. Please do help my mother. She'll die soon because of the poison I gave her."

The priest shook his head and said,

"To tell the truth, that powder is not poison. It is the powder of potatoes. It'll never make her ill. It is perhaps because your mother worked too much. If she had a rest for a few days, she will be better. I'm sure the potato powder had good influence on you and your mother. You must always be kind to your mother. Do you understand?"

She bowed down to him expressing her highest gratitude.

Soon her mother got well and they lived a peaceful and fruitful life for ever. (99.1.22)

むかし、むかし、ある家に若い嫁とその姑が住んでおりました。二人は、仲が悪く、いつも喧嘩が絶えませんでした。姑は、嫁がどんなにきれいに家の掃除をしても、汚いところを探し出しては、小言を言いました。姑は、嫁がどんなに一生懸命食事を作っても、とてもまずくて食べられないと言いました。さらには、近所でも嫁の悪口を言いふらしています。

一方、嫁も姑が大嫌いで、姑に呼ばれても、聞こえないふりをしました。いつも姑に対してはふくれっつらをしていました。

これ以上、顔をあわせたくないと思った嫁は、お寺の和尚さんの所へ相談に行きました。

「わかりました。それでは、この毒の粉を差し上げましょう。」

と和尚さんは言うと、粉を嫁に渡しました。

「これを、お母さんに食事を出す時、ちょっと混ぜて下され。だんだんと体が弱って、いずれ病気になって亡くなることでしょう。でも、いいですか、気づかれないようにお母さんには、たいそうやさしくすることですよ。お母さんの言うことをよく聞いて、やさしくするのですよ。」

嫁は、さっそく、その毒の粉をご飯に混ぜ始めました。まずくて食べられないと、お母さんに言われましたが、その度、畳に手をついて謝りました。

「申し訳ございません。今後気をつけますので、どうかお許し下さい。」

嫁は、掃除の後、お母さんに小言を言われる度に、床に手をついて謝りました。

「申し訳ございません。もう一回きれいにいたします。どうかお許し下さい。」

和尚さんに言われたとおり、毒をご飯に混ぜ続けているので、いずれお母さんは病気になると嫁は思っていました。しかし、一向にその気配はないどころか、益々元気になっていきました。

一番驚いたことは、お母さんが近所の人に、こんな風に言い始めたことです。

「うちの嫁は、出来た嫁じゃ。働き者で、料理もうまい。国一番の自慢の嫁じゃ。」

お母さんも嫁と一緒に家の掃除をするようになりました。嫁には、どうしたことかわかりませんでした。お母さんにほめられるたびに、嫁はうれしくなりました。知らずの内に、嫁はいつも笑顔でいるようになりました。ご飯に毒を混ぜるのは止めました。

ある日のことです。お母さんは、突然具合が悪くなり床に伏していました。嫁は、毒が効いてきたと 思いました。お母さんを看病しながら、目に涙があふれてきました。

その涙を見て、お母さんが言いました。

「心配しなくても大丈夫だよ。時期によくなるから。元気になったら、また一緒に働こうね。ありが とう。」

嫁は、そこに座っていられず、お寺の和尚さんの所へ駆け込みました。

「和尚さん、私が馬鹿でした。お母さんは、私にとてもやさしくしてくれます。それなのに、私は、 毒をもってしまいました。お母さんを助けてください。私がもった毒で死んでしまいます。」 和尚さんは、首を振ると、こう言いました。

「実はな、あの粉は毒じゃないのだ。じゃがいものの粉でな、病気には決してならん。きっと働きすぎであろう。二、三日寝てれば、よくなるじゃろ。じゃがいもの粉の効き目が二人にあったようじゃな。お母さんには、いつもやさしくするのじゃよ。」

嫁は、深々と頭をさげてお礼を言いました。

まもなくお母さんは元気になり、二人は仲良く暮らしました。めでたし、めでたし。(2004.1.16)