

MR. BIM'S BAMBOO

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MR. BIM had a bamboo garden and bamboo shop in a small village by a large mountain. He was old, and his face had more wrinkles than the mountain had trees, but he was both happy and busy. Seeing people made him happy and taking care of his bamboo kept him busy.

All the people liked him. He wore a shining white suit and shoes with pointed toes. He had a fine black hat that he brushed every day. He carried a beautiful bamboo cane with a top carved like a dragon's head. Yes, everyone said, Mr. Bim always looked grand. His bamboo was fine, too, and his shop was filled with useful things. But what people liked best of all were Mr. Bim's songs.

Every day he would sing. "I have bamboo trays and bamboo hats, bamboo pots and bamboo mats. I have bamboo frames and bamboo poles, bamboo rugs and bamboo bowls. Try Bim's bamboo!"

People would hurry inside and buy. "Mr. Bim has the best bamboo in all the world," they told one another, smiling and nodding and bowing.

Seeing people and making them happy made Mr. Bim feel so good that his hat would nearly touch the ground as he bowed.

Then one morning some people came from the other side of the mountain. Mr. Bim called to them. "I have the best, as you can see, come and buy bamboo from me."

The new people stopped and stared at him. The children looked at his garden and made funny faces. Inside his shop a man frowned and a woman sighed. "Bim's bamboo-foo!" she said.

Mr. Bim's smile disappeared as quickly as a butterfly in a windstorm. "What?" he asked. "What?"

“Bamboo is old,” the woman told him. “We want new things, modern things. In our city we buy plastic. Bim’s bamboo-foo!”

Mr. Bim had never heard of plastic. He wondered where it grew. And so he politely asked the newcomers.

“Plastic doesn’t grow!” a man said. “Plastic must be made.”

Mr. Bim was still puzzled. “But if you don’t grow the plastic, how can you be sure that you will have more when you need it? I make sure my bamboo plants are strong and healthy.”

The people laughed, and a young woman said, “But nobody wants bamboo. It’s old and useless. New things are always better.”

“Oh,” Mr. Bim said. He felt sad that people were laughing at him. His wrinkled face grew more wrinkled.

Soon all the people in his small village were talking about the plastic from the other side of the mountain. They wanted plastic things, too. And so they went to new shops.

“You must change your ways,” Mr. Bim’s friends told him. “You must become modern. You must go over the mountain to the factories and buy new things to sell in your shop.”

Mr. Bim shook his head. “I cannot change my ways now,” he said. “I am old like a turtle, and my ways are like a turtle shell—they make me what I am. I cannot change. I don’t think that old things are always useless.”

The moon grew plump in the sky and then wasted away to a hungry sliver many, many times. As the months and then the years passed, Mr. Bim stayed near his quiet shop on the empty street. He took care of his lovely garden, he brushed his fine hat, he kept his white coat and trousers shining, and he dusted his beautiful bamboo. But he did not sing his happy songs, because no one came to buy.

After all the people had moved away from the small village, Mr. Bim forgot the words to his songs. He stopped dusting his beautiful bamboo. “It’s foolish,” he said. “No one will ever buy it again. Just like me, it’s old and useless.” Feeling sad and lonely, he closed his doors and sat down in front of his shop. He looked at the mountains far off in the distance.

In the wintertime he saw that the mountaintops were covered with glistening white snow. Every spring the snow melted into sparkling waterfalls. During the hot summer months the water disappeared. But then, in late fall and winter, the snow gradually came back to the mountaintops again, glistening white and beautiful, the same as before. Birds, plants, and animals lived on the mountains all year long. The old became new and the new became old, and the mountains were always useful.

“I believe the mountains are trying to tell me something,” Mr. Bim said at last. “I must not worry. I must do what I do best, and somehow it will be useful to someone.” These ideas made him so happy that he opened the doors to his shop. Humming and smiling, he began dusting his beautiful bamboo again.

One day, while he was humming and working, he heard footsteps. “What’s this?” a small girl asked. She picked up a bamboo whistle and blew into it. When she heard the clear sound it made, she laughed. “Mommy! Come listen to this beautiful whistle.”

A young woman hurried inside. She had travel bags strapped to her back and she frowned at the child. “We must hurry on with the others,” she said. “You have many whistles. You don’t need another.”

“But this is different,” the child cried.

“Different?” The woman looked around the room. She caught her breath. “My goodness!” she said, clapping her hands together. “None of these things are plastic!” She turned to Mr. Bim. “What are they made of?”

Mr. Bim smiled. “Bamboo.”

“Bamboo?” The word sounded strange on the woman’s lips. “I’ve never heard of it. Is it new?”

“No, it’s old.”

“What factory makes it?”

Mr. Bim laughed. “Bamboo grows. I have bamboo plants in my garden and I made these bamboo things myself.”

“It *grows*?” The woman’s mouth fell open. “And you make all these beautiful things yourself? This is a miracle. A miracle!”

Mr. Bim bowed. “The old is not always useless, the new is not always best.”

“I must tell the others about these treasures,” the woman said, hurrying to the door. She called to her friends, and soon Mr. Bim’s shop was full of people whispering and talking.

“Beautiful,” they sighed. “A miracle!” they cried. “And what do you suppose? Bamboo *grows!*”

As people began buying his bamboo, Mr. Bim smiled and nodded. Soon he was so happy he began singing.

“I have bamboo trays and bamboo hats, bamboo pots and bamboo mats, bamboo frames and bamboo poles, bamboo rugs and bamboo bowls. Some useful things are old, some useful things are new. But what can be both at once? Bim’s bamboo!”